INDIAN ART OF THE GUPTA AGE

From Pre-Classical Roots to the Emergence of Medieval Trends



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S.R. GOYAL
SHANKAR GOYAL

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Editors :

Professor S.R. Goyal

Dr. Shankar Goyal

The Book :

The Gupta period was admittedly the Classical or Golden period of Indian history when ancient Indian culture saw efflorescence in almost all aspects of life, including architecture, sculpture and painting. The art of this period has been a subject of study since the beginning of Indological studies in modern times. The present monograph is the recent-most effort in this direction, but with a difference in approach and treatment. Firstly, it contains the fruits of the latest researches of some of the greatest authorities on the subject, including Professors Frederick M. Asher, Walter M. Spink, B.G. Gokhale, P.K. Agrawala, (the Late) K.D. Bajpai, M.K. Dhavalikar, S.N. Chaturvedi and Dr. S.P. Gupta, apart from the contribution of the editors themselves. Secondly, despite being the result of the cooperation of numerous scholars of India and abroad, it has a unity in treatment of the subject, for it seeks to trace the beginning of the Gupta art from its pre-Classical roots and after discussing its ideological background and various aspects, it goes on to delineate its transformation by the impact of the early medieval tendencies. Thus it provides a complete study of the Indian art of the Gupta age.

The Editors :

Professor S.R. Goyal is the retired Professor and Head, Department of History, JNV University, Jodhpur. Described as 'one of the five best recent historians of ancient India' by David N.Lorenzen, the great Mexican Orientalist, Professor Goyal combines all the qualities associated with scientific scholarship. He has authored more than thirty voluminous works and over 150 research papers which cover so diverse fields as political history, religious history, literature, biographies, numismatics and epigraphy. He

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पुस्तक-विवरण की तिथि नीचे अंकित है। इस तिथि सहित ३० वें दिन यह पुस्तक पुस्तकालय में वापिस आ जानी चाहिए। अन्यथा ५० पैसे प्रति दिन के हिसाब से विलम्ब-दण्ड लगेगा।

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Foreword

The age of the imperial Guptas is usually and rightly regarded as the Classical or Golden Age of Indian history. Though in recent years some scholars, especially those who have Marxist persuation, have raised objections against this widely accepted belief, but even now majority of historians by and large subscribe to the view that the Gupta age was the Golden Age of India and Gupta art is a mirror of all that was graceful, elegant, sweet and noble in the culture of that period.

Because of its importance, Gupta art has been studied by numerous scholars and on its various aspects countless papers and a large number of monographs have been written. Indeed it has attracted the attention of scholars since the beginning of Indological studies in modern times. The present monograph is the recent-most effort in this direction but it is different from earlier works in more than one respect. Firstly, it contains the fruits of the latest researches of some of the greatest authorities on the subject, including Professors Frederick M. Asher, Walter M. Spink, M.K. Dhavalikar, B.G. Gokhale, K.D. Bajpai, S.N. Chaturvedi and Dr. S.P. Gupta. Secondly, despite being the result of the cooperation of numerous scholars of India and other countries, it has a unity in the treatment of the subject. Its first three chapters form a sort of background. In the first chapter I have outlined the historical and ideological background of the Gupta art while in the second chapter Dr. S.P. Gupta has discussed the process by which Kushāṇa art got transformed into the classical art of the Gupta age. Then follows the chapter of Professor Frederick M. Asher in which he has given an overview of the art of the Gupta period, both of the imperial provinces and other regions.

The next five chapters deal with various aspects of the Gupta art. The fourth chapter by Professor P.K. Agrawala provides a detailed exposition of Gupta art and architecture while the fifth by Professor S.N. Chaturvedi is concerned with various facets and factors of Gupta sculpture. The next three chapters, respectively by Professor B.G. Gokhale, Dr. Shankar Goyal and myself, deal with the Buddhist art of the Gupta age, free-standing pillars of the Gupta age and the numismatic art of the period. The chapter on the numismatic art of the Guptas is an innovation, for this subject is not generally included in the works on Gupta art.

The next three chapters of the volume are concerned with the study of some regional styles of the Gupta art. In chapter nine the Late Professor K.D. Bajpai discusses the art of Central India and the Deccan, in chapter ten Professor Walter M. Spink studies the art of the caves of Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta, etc. with reference to their chronology, while chapter eleven by Professor M.K. Dhavalikar is concerned with some cultural aspects of the paintings of the Ajanta caves.

The twelfth or concluding chapter is by Dr. Shankar Goyal. In it he has shown how in the early post-Gupta centuries the classicism of the Gupta age gradually declined and medieval factor became more and more pronounced in Indian art. Thus, the story of the art of the Gupta age which begins with the emergence of classicism and the transformation of the Kushāṇa art into Gupta art comes to a close with the decline of classicism and the emergence of medieval factor in Indian art.

The present volume on Gupta art is largely the outcome of the sustained efforts of Dr. Shankar Goyal, its co-editor, who has taken deep interest in Gupta history, art and culture which is evidenced by the facts that he co-edited *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar* (with Shri M.C. Joshi, who recently retired as Director-General, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, and Dr. S.K. Gupta, till recently Head, Department of History and Indian Culture, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur), produced his widely acclaimed work *The Image of Classical India : Its Changing*

Colours and Contours and was involved in the making of a film *The Art of the Gupta Age* produced by EMRC, Jodhpur. It was in a way natural, therefore, that he planned a monograph on the Gupta art in which contributions of various eminent art-historians, both Indian and of other countries, were to be included. He also persuaded me to write a couple of chapters and undertake the main task of editing it. I am grateful to him for the same but must put on record that this monograph is largely the result of his patience, industry and sustained efforts.

I am also greatly obliged to all those eminent scholars who have enriched this volume by their valuable contributions and to all those institutions, museums and individuals who very kindly permitted us to reproduce their very fine photographs either directly or through the authors of the various chapters. Separate acknowledgement for each photograph has been made in the list of plates.

S.R. Goyal

Editorial

In the Gupta age Indian culture saw efflorescence in almost all aspects of life, including architecture, sculpture and painting. My interest in Gupta art commenced when I was a Post-Graduate student in the Deccan College, Pune, and studied this branch of Indology under my illustrious teachers there. It took a more tangible form when I organised a 'Seminar by Correspondence' on the problem of the identity of King Chandra of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription. The Meharauli pillar is made of pure iron and is a unique specimen of the Gupta art and metallurgy, while the inscription of Chandra engraved on it is perhaps the most enigmatic though highly significant record of the Gupta period. In the aforesaid 'Seminar' in all twenty-six Indian historians and epigraphists, including Professors S.R. Goyal (who presented the lead-paper), Jagannath Agrawal, B.Ch.Chhabra, B.P. Sinha, S.B. Deo, K.D. Bajpai, V.S. Pathak, Lallanji Gopal and A.M. Shastri, who are regarded among the greatest authorities on the subject, participated. The papers of the 'Seminar', and also some papers on the art and metallurgy of the iron pillar, were published in 1989 in a monograph titled *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar* edited by Shri M.C. Joshi, Dr. S.K. Gupta and myself.

My interest in the study of the Gupta age further enhanced when I became a teacher in the Department of History, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, and completed in 1992 my research work for doctoral dissertation on *Main Trends in Indian Historiography Since Independence*. The following years saw my two wishes come true. Firstly, in 1994 I became involved in the making of a film titled *The Art of the Gupta Age*, produced by EMRC, Jodhpur. I wrote its script, and worked

as its subject-expert. It was telecast several times in the UGC programme. Secondly, in 1997 was published my monograph *The Image of Classical India: Its Changing Colours and Contours*, which delineates the changing attitudes of modern scholars on the writing of history of the Gupta age, and also studies the recently discovered material on the subject.

Meanwhile, I had planned a monograph on Gupta art. For this I naturally looked for guidance to my father Professor S.R. Goyal, who is one of the greatest living authorities on Gupta history. I was also fortunate in having the blessings and cooperation of some of the greatest scholars working on Gupta art and was able to persuade them to contribute their chapters to the proposed volume. My father also wrote two chapters and also agreed to shoulder the main burden of editing it. Thus, the monograph *Indian Art of the Gupta Age* became a reality. For this I extend my sincere thanks to my father and to all those esteemed scholars whose contributions are included in this work. They are all my seniors and their goodwill is a valuable asset for me.

Professor K.D. Bajpai, who was kind enough to oblige me by contributing a chapter for this volume, joined the company of gods before the volume could be brought out. How I wish he was alive today!

I am also extremely grateful to all those institutions, museums and individual scholars who gave their permission unhesitatingly to reproduce their excellent photographs here.

Shankar Goyal

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Abbreviations

AI	Ancient India—Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India
AIU	The Age of Imperial Unity, ed. by R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker
AMMK	Ārya Mañjuśrī Mūla Kalpa
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
ASI, AR	Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Reports
CGD	Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa, in the British Museum, by John Allan
CA	The Classical Age, ed. by R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker
Coinage	The Coinage of the Gupta Empire, by A.S. Altekar
Comp.Hist.	A Comprehensive History of India, Vol.II, ed. by K.A.N. Sastri and Vol.III, ed. by R.C. Majumdar and K.K. Dasgupta
Corpus	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
DHI	Development of Hindu Iconography, by J.N. Banerjea
DKM	The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha, by B.P. Sinha
EI	Epigraphia Indica
HIG	A History of the Imperial Guptas, by S.R. Goyal
Hist. Ind.	History of India, 150 A.D. to 350 A.D., by K.P. Jayaswal
IHI	An Imperial History of India in a Sanskrit Text, by K.P. Jayaswal
IHR	Indian Historical Review, New Delhi

JAIH	Journal of Ancient Indian History, Calcutta
JAS	Journal of Asiatic Society, Calcutta
JBRS	Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Patna
JISOA	Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta
JNSI	Journal of the Numismatic Society of India, Varanasi
JOI	Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda
JUPHS	Journal of the U.P. Historical Society, Lucknow
Life	Life of Hiüen Tsang, by S. Beal
MASI	Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India
NHIP	A New History of the Indian People, Vol.VI, The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age, ed. by R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar
Records	Buddhist Records of the Western World, by S. Beal
Sel. Ins.	Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization, Vol.I, ed. by D.C. Sircar
Travels	On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, by T. Watters
VIJ	The Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal, Hoshiarpur

Chapter One

Historical and Ideological Background

Early Historical Background

The first ruler of the Gupta dynasty to claim imperial status was Mahārājādhirāja (Supreme King of the Great Kings) Chandragupta I. It is generally supposed that the Gupta Era of 319 A.D. was initiated by him from the date of his coronation or from the year of the assumption of imperial title by him.[1] According to some historians, however, it was founded by Samudragupta, his son and successor,[2] or by Chandragupta II, the son and successor of Samudragupta, though Chandragupta II might have counted it from the date of the accession of Chandragupta I.[3]

Chandragupta I was preceded by his father Ghaṭotkacha and grandfather Gupta, both of whom have been given the inferior title *Mahārāja* though they were most likely independent rulers. The original kingdom of the Guptas was situated, according to the belief of most earlier scholars, in Magadha with Pāṭaliputra as their capital, but now the suggestions of the present writer that the original Gupta kingdom was located in the eastern part of the present Uttar Pradesh[4] and Prayāga

1. *The Classical Age*, Bombay, 1954, p. 4; *A New History of the Indian People*, Vol. VI, ed. by R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, Lahore, 1946, p. 158.

2. *CA*, p. 5.

3. Gupta, P.L., *JBRS*, XLII, March 1956, pp. 72 ff.

4. *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967, pp. 44 ff. R.S. Sharma, Vasudeva Upadhyaya, A.M. Shastri, Frederick M. Asher, S.K. Maity, T.P. Verma, Ashvini Agrawal, T.R. Sharma and many others have accepted this suggestion. For references see, Goyal, Shankar, *Recent Historiography of Ancient India*, Jodhpur, 1997. Chapters 8 and 9 of this work are invaluable for a critical study of the latest researches on Gupta history.

(mod. Allahabad) was most likely their capital[1] are gradually finding general acceptance.[2] Similarly, the earlier views that the Guptas belonged to the Kshatriya or Vaiśya *varṇa* or some inferior caste[3] are now being generally discarded in favour of the suggestion of the present writer that the Guptas were Brāhmaṇas of the Dhāraṇa *gotra*.[4]

Chandragupta I married Kumāradevī, a daughter of the Lichchhavi chief of Bihar, and their son Samudragupta was adopted as his own son and successor by the father of Kumāradevī. According to the Prayāga *praśasti* composed by Harisheṇa, Sumudragupta's Minister for War and Peace, his patron was also nominated to ascend the Gupta throne by his father Chandragupta I which made 'the princes of equal birth' unhappy. Samudragupta was thus a *dvyāmushyāyaṇa* (that is, the successor of his father and maternal grandfather both).[5] The generally prevalent view that Kumāradevī was the successor of her Lichchhavi father and thus a regnant queen and that Gupta and Lichchhavi states were amalgamated after a joint-rule of Chandragupta I and Kumāradevī,[6] must be given up for, as we have pointed out elsewhere,[7] in ancient India daughters never enjoyed the right of succession to the throne. The assumption that Samudragupta has been mentioned as *Lichchhavidauhitra* probably because he was given some help by his maternal grandfather, can hardly explain the reference to his being a *Lichchhavidauhitra* throughout the

1. *HIG*, pp. 210-13.
2. E.g. now R.S. Sharma, V.S. Pathak, V.Upadhyaya, A.M. Shastri, etc. subscribe to this view.
3. For references see Goyal, S.R., *HIG*, pp. 70-80.
4. Scholars like R.B. Pandey, U.N. Roy, A.M. Shastri, T.P. Verma, Ashvini Agrawal and D.C. Shukla now agree with our suggestion. For references vide Goyal, Shankar, *op.cit.*
5. For a detailed discussion see *HIG*, pp.122 ff. This view of the present writer, earlier adumbrated by V.S.Pathak (*JNSI*, XIX, Pt.II, pp.148 ff.) and called 'Pathak-Goyal Hypothesis' by Thomas R.Trautmann, has been followed *mutatis mutandis* by P.L.Gupta, V.C.Pandey, B.P.Sinha, Mahesh Chandra Joshi and many others.
6. *NHIP*, p. 128.
7. *HIG*, pp. 89ff.

history of the dynasty. Such a *constant* reference in the *genealogy* of the family could only mean that he was regarded as the *dauhitra* category son of his maternal grandfather, a fact which was further publicized by Samudragupta by the issuance of Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins on which the Lichchhavis *(Lichchhavayaḥ)* are also mentioned on the reverse. The immediate need for such a publicity probably arose when his step-brother Kācha, now known from his gold coins and the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa,*[1] who was quite probably elder to Samudragupta, assisted by some other princes 'of equal birth' claimed the throne on the basis of his seniority making it necessary for Samudragupta to emphasize and publicize that he was choosen as successor by his father Chandragupta I and as he was the son (of *dauhitra* category) and successor of his maternal grandfather as well, his accession would result in the amalgamation of the two states. Such a reconstruction satisfactorily explains all the available evidence—of the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins, Kācha coins, the Prayāga *praśasti* and the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa,* etc.

Samudragupta turned out to be a great conqueror. He (1) uprooted nine kings of Āryāvarta (most of them belonging to Nāga lineage), (2) defeated and reinstated twelve kings of the Deccan, (3) reduced *āṭavika* (forest) kings, nine tribal states and five *pratyanta* (frontier) kingdoms to vassalage, and (4) forced the Śakas and Muruṇḍas (of the Punjab), Daivaputra Shāhi (the Kushāṇa ruler of the North-West), Shāhānushāhi (probably the emperor of Iran or his governor of Bactria) and the people of Ceylon and all other islands (of S.E. Asia) to behave in a submissively friendly manner by coming to his court, entering into matrimonial alliance with him and requesting him for the grant of written charters *(śāsanayāchana)* for continuing to rule over their own territories. The claim of Samudragupta as regards the first three categories of the powers

1. The word *kācha* literally means 'ash'. Kācha is, therefore, identifiable with Bhasma (which also literally means 'ash') mentioned as a step-brother of Samudragupta in the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. This work mentions many kings in this fashion.

seems to be more or less based on facts, while the description of his relations with the foreign potentates on the face of it appears to be hyperbolic, but only if we assume that he forced each of them to accept literally all the conditions enumerated above. Such an assumption would be unnatural as Harisheṇa could not have claimed that *all* these rulers sent their daughters to the Gupta *harem,* attended the Gupta court personally and requested for the grant of charters to rule over their own respective kingdoms. Obviously, therefore, each of them must have followed not all but any one (or more) of these policies which Harisheṇa has clubbed together. It is also possible that he interpreted the attitude of the foreign potentates in such a way as to glorify his own master. For example, the overtures for an alliance by, say, the Kushāṇas, who were in trouble at that time because of the Hūṇa and Persian invasions,[1] could be described by Harisheṇa as *śāsanayāchana* by them.

Be that as it may, Samudragupta occupied most of North India (except its western part) either as sovereign or suzerain and created a fear for the Gupta power over large parts of the Deccan and South India (at least upto Kāñchī) and also among the foreign powers of the North-Western and Western India and South-East Asia.

Samudragupta was not only a great conqueror but also a wise administrator. He was largely the creator of the Gupta Golden Age. He performed at least one Aśvamedha (probably more than one) and issued several types of gold coins, one of which proves that he was himself a great *vīṇā* player. With him the Indian numismatic art acquired an honourable place among the arts of the period.

The Prayāga *praśasti* describes Samudragupta as a great musician, a king of poets *(Kavirāja)*, a helper of the poor and miserable, a donor of lacs of cows and gold coins and patron of letters. According to the present writer, he patronized Kālidāsa and probably Vasubandhu the Elder also. His usual title was 'Parākramāṅka' which means Sun of Valour, an exact translation of 'Vikramāditya'. As a matter of fact the title 'Vikrama' is

1. *HIG*, pp. 168 ff.

found on one of his coins. His *praśasti* is engraved on an Aśokan pillar which was probably used as *yūpa* in his Aśvamedha. A life-size figure of a horse from Khairigarh on the Nepal border has been associated with him on the basis of a now effaced inscription. But apart from being a follower of the Vedic tradition he was also a Vaishṇava by faith and used Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Vishṇu, as the emblem of his dynasty.

A posthumous *praśasti* has been found engraved in Gupta characters of c.400 A.D. on the iron pillar of Meharauli (described as *Vishṇudhvaja* in the *praśasti* itself). The pillar, raised sometime in the last decades of the fourth century, is a splendid example of the great advance made by the iron smiths and iron sculptors of the period. Its epigraph narrates the achievements of a king named Chandra. The record does not give his date or genealogy but tells us that he established sole supreme sovereignty by the prowess of his arms, defeated a confederacy of Vaṅga kings, crossed the seven mouths of the Sindhu (i.e. Saptasindhu) to repulse the invading Vāhlikas and carried the fame of his victorious arms upto the Southern Ocean. He is usually identified with Chandragupta II, the son and successor of Samudragupta, but now scholars like B.Ch. Chhabra, S.B.Deo, Munish Chandra Joshi and a host of others agree with the suggestion of the present author that the achievements of 'Chandra' and other facts about him remind one of Samudragupta, rather than Chandragupta II[1] and tend to prove their oneness. The difference in name is no problem, for ancient Indian kings are sometimes mentioned in epigraphs by more than one names; Chandragupta II himself is mentioned by his another name Devagupta in his own Udayagiri record as well as in most of the Vākāṭaka inscriptions.

Post-Samudragupta Period

Samudragupta was succeeded by his son Chandragupta II (c.376 - c.412 A.D.). Rāmagupta, the elder son of Samudragupta, was earlier known

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1. For a detailed discussion on this problem and views of the above-mentioned and other scholars see Joshi, Munish Chandra, Gupta, S.K. and Goyal, Shankar, (eds.), *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, Meerut, 1989.

only from some literary sources, the reliability of which was doubted by many. But later his copper coins were found copiously from East Malwa and three Jaina images with short inscriptions containing a reference to Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta were discovered from Durjanpur, near Vidisha. Joanna Gottfried Williams regards it as reasonable to assume that these images are 'works of the 370s',[1] that in many features they are close to the latest Kushāṇa works and that their conservatism 'confirms the assumption that no distinctively "Gupta" styles had been formulated so far.'[2] These images being the earliest ones to be definitely associated with a Gupta ruler have naturally come to occupy an important place in the history of Gupta art.

According to the literary tradition, specially the drama *Devīchandraguptam* of Viśākhadeva, Rāmagupta was a cowardly king who agreed to surrender his queen Dhruvadevī to the Śaka invader, but his brave younger brother Chandragupta, disguised as the queen (Dhruvadevī, the wife of Rāmagupta), killed the Śaka ruler and later on Rāmagupta as well, and thus won the throne as well as Dhruvadevī, whom he made his own queen. She might have been his old love as the story preserved in the Persian work *Mujmal-ut-Tawarikh* seems to suggest. But in the light of V.S. Pathak's analysis of the methodology and motifs used by ancient and medieval Indian authors to whitewash the misdeeds of their patrons in their literary works,[3] we believe that Viśākha has done the same and that Rāmagupta was as normal a prince as any other. At the time of the death of Samudragupta he was quite likely the governor of East Malwa from where his coins and inscriptions are found. Taking advantage of his elder brother's absence from the capital, Chandragupta II usurped the throne and later, when the Śakas invaded East Malwa, he, under the pretext of saving the kingdom, killed the Śaka invader and with him Rāmagupta also, and later on married Dhruvadevī, the widow of the

1. Williams, Joanna G., *The Art of Gupta India*, p. 28.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
3. Pathak, V.S., *Ancient Historians of India*, pp. 9 ff.

latter. It was to whitewash these misdeeds of his that Viśākha, the author of the drama *Devīchandraguptam,* who was probably a *sāmanta* of Chandragupta II, portrayed Rāmagupta as a cowardly and impotent prince while Chandragupta II himself spread the belief that he was selected as successor by Samudragupta himself (cf. the phrase *tatpādaparigṛhīta,* that is 'accepted by him', that is by Samudragupta, used for Chandragupta II in Gupta records). It is not unlikely that such a claim was made even in the now lost portions of Viśākha's drama.

Chandragupta II rounded off the conquests of Samudragupta in the western direction by putting an end to the rule of the Western Śaka Kshatrapas. No other military exploit of his is known, provided one does not ascribe the Meharauli pillar inscription to him. He married his daughter Prabhāvatīguptā, begotten on Kuberanāgā, his Nāga queen, with Rudrasena II Vākāṭaka. According to a literary tradition, he sent Kālidāsa to the court of the Kuntala king who had left the care of his own kingdom in the hands of Vikramāditya (that is, Chandragupta II). Intimate contacts between the Gupta and Vākāṭaka states are also reflected in the spread of the Gupta art styles in the Vākāṭaka realm.

Chandragupta II issued numerous types of gold coins from which his faith in Vaishṇavism is obvious and also silver coins following the Śaka prototypes. His gold coins opened a new chapter in the history of Gupta numismatic art. During his reign Fa-hsien, the famous Chinese pilgrim, visited India. He does not mention Chandragupta II, but gives an account of the life of North India as he saw it when obviously Chandragupta II was ruling.

Chandragupta II adopted the title Vikramāditya. The present writer supports the view that the king Vikramāditya of legends is a composite personality in whom the achievements of Gupta Vikramādityas, specially of Samudragupta, Chandragupta II and Skandagupta, were remembered by posterity. The greatest contribution of Samudragupta to the origin and evolution of the Vikramāditya legend belongs to the fields of wars and conquests, for the *digvijaya* of the legendary Vikramāditya as

described in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī*, etc. immediately reminds one of the conquests of Samudragupta. Among other elements of the Vikramāditya legend that are traceable in the personality and achievements of Samudragupta are his gift of gold and cows, his victory over the Śakas, his rule over Ujjayinī and his patronage to Kālidāsa[1] and others. As regards Chandragupta II, the facts that he was also a Śakāri (enemy of the Śakas), patronized Kālidāsa (who might have outlived Samudragupta to grace the court of Chandragupta II as well) and a host of other scholars, was intimately connected with Ujjayinī and was interested in Vetāla *sādhanā* (as deposed by the drama *Devīchandraguptam*), are the obvious pointers to his contribution to the Vikramāditya legend.

Here it may also be pointed out that the Vāhlikas, whom king Chandra (most likely Samudragupta or possibly Chandragupta II) defeated after crossing the Saptasindhu were most probably Hūṇas and Skandagupta Vikramāditya also defeated the Hūṇas and Mlechchhas—an additional similarity which might have also helped in the fusion of the personalities of these great Gupta Vikramādityas in the popular memory.

Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumāragupta I Mahendrāditya (c.413-55 A.D.). His long reign of over four decades seems to have been largely peaceful when prosperity and pride in the dynasty were already well-established. His reign saw the acme of Gupta glory and maturity in cultural and art-activities. He issued largest number of gold coin types though some of them show a decline in numismatic art.

It is quite possible that the last years of Kumāragupta I were disturbed by the invasion of the Vākāṭakas, who probably counter-attacked in reply to a Gupta-inspired Nala attack on them.[2] It is also quite possible that Skandagupta Vikramāditya (c.455-67 A.D.), the son and successor of Kumāragupta I, who claims to have defeated his rival

1. *HIG*, pp. 217-19.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 257 ff.

brothers, the Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras, had to face some of these difficulties when Kumāragupta I was still alive.[1]

The wars and difficulties of Skandagupta described in his Junagarh and Bhitari records, specially the Hūṇa invasion, seem to have been quite grave and due to their cumulative effect further expansion of the empire stopped. He issued fewer coin types in gold in which there is found a marked decline in artistry and percentage of pure gold.

The genealogy and chronology of the imperial Guptas after Skandagupta are rather uncertain. According to the scheme advocated by us in detail elsewhere,[2] he was succeeded by Narasiṁhagupta I Bālāditya (the son of Purugupta, a brother of Skandagupta) who in turn was followed by Bālāditya's son Kumāragupta II Kramāditya (known date 473 A.D.). Kumāragupta II was overthrown by Budhagupta (c. 476-c.94 A.D.), another son of Purugupta. By the time of Budhagupta, who adopted the title Vikrama, western provinces and the Bundelkhand-Baghelkhand region were lost to the empire which also became internally weak. After Budhagupta ruled in quick succession Chandragupta III Vikramāditya (known only from the *ĀMMK* and his coins), Vainyagupta Dvādaśāditya (known date 507 A.D.), Bhānugupta (known date 510 A.D.) and Prakāśāditya. It was in the early years of the sixth century that the Hūṇas under Toramāṇa swept down on the empire. Bhānugupta tried to stem their tide but failed and Narasiṁhagupta II Bālāditya, the successor of Prakāśāditya, had to accept the suzerainty of Mihirakula (c.512 - c.535 A.D.),[3] the son and successor of Toramāṇa. But ultimately the Hūṇas were defeated by Narasiṁhagupta II Bālāditya (Bālādityarāja of Yuan Chwang) probably with the help of his vassals, specially the Maukharis, and also separately by emperor Yaśodharman-Vishṇuvardhana of Mandasor (known date 532 A.D.). But by that time the Gupta empire was in existence only in name; Kumāragupta III Kramāditya and

1. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 314 ff.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 342 f.

Vishṇugupta Chandrāditya, the last two emperors, enjoying only nominal power.

Brāhmaṇical Revival in the Early Gupta Age : Its Nature

The process of the expansion of the Gupta empire as also the process of its disintegration are important from the point of view of the history of Gupta art because the main features of the Gupta art became widespread with the expansion of the empire while the decline of classicism and emergence of medievalism in Indian art, which resulted in the growth of regional art-schools, were concomitant with the disintegration of the Gupta empire and rise of local kingdoms in the various parts of the country.

The emergence of the Gupta kingdom, which soon became an empire, was accompanied by and connected with the Brāhmaṇical revival. "The available data show that the Vedic sacrifices were never more popular since the revival of Hinduism than during the 3rd and the 4th centuries."[1] But the main feature of the religious renaissance of this period was the rapprochement between the Vedic and the devotional schools and the gradual triumph of the latter. The Bhāraśivas performed ten horse-sacrifices, but they constantly carried on their person the emblem of Śiva. The Vākāṭaka emperor Pravarasena I performed a large number of Vedic sacrifices like Bṛhaspatisava, Aśvamedha, Agnishṭoma, Āptoryāma, Ukthya and Atirātra, but his successor Rudrasena I was a devotee of Śiva and latter's grandson Rudrasena II was a worshipper of Chakrapāṇi. The Guptas themselves very enthusiastically performed Aśvamedha sacrifices, but at the same time very anxiously proclaimed themselves *Paramabhāgavatas*. However, gradually the Vedic gods and the cult of sacrifice lost popular appeal and Paurāṇic religion got the upper hand.[2] This trend—the revival of Brāhmaṇism with the rapprochement between the Vedic and the devotional traditions and the gradual though final victory of the latter—is also evidenced by the

1. *NHIP*, p. 369.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

archaeological data. Commenting on the *Charaṇa* and temple sealings found at various sites, V.S. Pathak observes : "Several seals of various temples—...have been discovered at Basarh, Bhita, Nalanda and Rajghat whereas the finds of *Charaṇa* seals are almost negligible. Secondly, temple-seals continue from 3rd-4th century A.D. down to the end of early mediaeval period. The eight Avimukteśvara sealings range from 5th century A.D. to 11th century A.D. But *Charaṇa* seals suddenly stop after the Gupta age. The conclusion is, therefore, irresistible that the *Charaṇa*-institution was gradually disappearing while its *āgamic* counterpart, the temple institution, was increasingly gaining popularity."[1]

The Brāhmaṇical revival had many aspects. Firstly, it was extremely nationalist in character. As it was largely the result of a reaction against the dominance of the foreigners who were by and large the patrons of heterodox faiths, it was bound to be so. The meaning and significance of this aspect of the movement become apparent if we compare the nature of the Mauryan empire with the character of the Gupta state which was the product of this movement. It has been recognised that the Mauryan government was to a great extent influenced by the Achaemenid and Hellenistic traditions.[2] In contrast to the Mauryan empire, the Gupta state was almost thoroughly Indian in character. If 'the Mauryan polity with its bureaucratic and pervasive paternalism was an exception to the norm of ancient Indian state', the Gupta administration was in accordance with the best traditions laid down in the text books on the Hindu polity. Similarly, the Gupta art was not a mere parenthesis in the development of the indigenous art of India; it was the high watermark of ancient Indian artistic traditions. Even the Buddhist art of this period was free of the foreign influences. As Smith remarks[3] in connection with the Sarnath figure, the Gupta Buddha "is absolutely independent of the Gandhāra

1. *JNSI*, XX,Pt.II,p. 198.
2. *Comp.Hist.Ind.*,II, pp. 54-55.
3. Smith, V.A., *History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*,p. 170.

school.'' It ''reveals the fullest fruition of the original Indian genius in carving out a figure in perfect harmony with its spiritual conceptions.''[1] The Śaiva and Vaishṇava sculpture of this period confirm this conclusion.[2]

The best illustration of the nationalist orientation of the Gupta culture is provided by the coinage of the imperial Guptas. When the foundations of the empire were laid, the Kushāṇa dress—long-tailed coat, trousers and peaked cap—was popular in the higher circle of the Hindu society just as the European dress is popular among the educated classes of modern India even when the country has become independent. Even in the marriage scene depicted on the coins of Chandragupta I - Kumāradevī type, the Gupta emperor is shown as wearing Kushāṇa coat and trousers. He does not discard it even when offering oblations on alter in the Standard type. The goddess on the reverse on the early coins is an exact copy of Ardoksho; only her name is omitted. Contrary to Hindu canons of propriety, Samudragupta is shown as his own standard-bearer, probably because such was the case with the king on the Kushāṇa coins, which were being imitated by the Gupta mint-masters.[3] But gradually the king began to be shown in Indian dress, though foreign coat and trousers lingered on for several decades. Ardoksho was transformed into Durgā or Lakshmī and the Standard type was Indianised by substituting the standard either by the *paraśu* or by the bow.[4] One can confidently say that the ''vast majority of the types of the Gupta emperors are thoroughly national.''[5] Thus, the coinage of the Guptas provide us an illustrative commentary on the contemporary psychology towards the cultural problems of the day and of the nationalist bias of the leaders of society.

Apart from being nationalistic, the Brāhmaṇical revival was a great

1. Agrawala, V.S., in *NHIP*, p. 448.
2. *Ibid.*, pp.448-52; *Studies in Indian Art*, pp. 199 ff.
3. Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p. 15.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
5. *Ibid.*

unifying force. In the post-Kushāṇa period, under the impact of the reviving Brāhmaṇism, the forces of disintegration began to become weaker and once again the idea of 'universal empire' (comprising the whole of the country or the *chakravarti-kshetra)* became popular. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* declared that the "*chakravartīs* are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. They have lived in ages past and will come again in the future. In all the three ages—past, present and future—even in the *Tretā* age other *chakravartīs* have been and will be born."[1] A few centuries later Medhātithi, the great commentator of Manu, expressed the idea in this manner : "A king of meritorious conduct could conquer even the land of the *mlechchhas*, establish *chāturvarṇya* there, assign to the *mlechchhas* a position occupied by the *chaṇḍālas* in Āryāvarta and render that land as fit for sacrifice as Āryāvarta itself."[2] The Gupta emperors, at least of the first five generations, seem to have lived in accordance with this ideal.

Political Ideology of the Guptas

The political thinking of the Gupta emperors and their approach towards political problems were greatly influenced by their religious leanings. To us it appeas a matter of some significance that while almost all the Gupta emperors were *Paramabhāgavatas* or great devotees of Vishṇu, most of their rivals e.g. the Nāgas, the Vākāṭakas, the Hūṇas, the Maitrakas and even Yaśodharman of Mandasor were staunch Śaivas. But, for the moment let us concentrate only on their early rivals viz. the Vākāṭakas and the Bhāraśivas. The Vākāṭaka kings were usually the devotees of Mahābhairava or Maheśvara, while the Bhāraśivas were so known on account of their carrying the *Śivaliṅga* on their shoulders. But the point which is more important in this context is their claim that their 'royal line owed its origin to the great satisfaction of Śiva' (*Śiva-suparitushṭa-samutpāditarājavaṁśānām*).[3] Similarly, the Vākāṭakas

1. *Vāyu Purāṇa*, XLVII. 72-76.
2. Quoted in *CA*, p. x.
3. Fleet, *Corpus*, III, pp. 236-37.

believed that they 'possessed the favour of the god Śambhu.'[1] These facts tend to show that the political thinking of these kings was not unconnected with their affiliation with Śaivism. On the other hand, the political ideals of the Guptas had a distinct imprint of Vaishṇavism. As noted above, the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, a work of the early Gupta period, declares that "the *chakravartīs* are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. They have lived in ages past and will come again in future. ...They will enjoy wealth, plenty, *Dharma*, ambition, fame and victory in undisturbed harmony. They will excel the Ṛishis in their power to achieve results, by their lordliness, by providing plenty and by discipline."[2] On these lines the influence of the Gupta rulers and of their age is quite distinct. Till the beginning of the Gupta epoch, the *chakravartī* ideal was connected mainly with the performance of the various Vedic sacrifices.[3] Perhaps, in order to bring it in tune with spirit and polity of his age, the author of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* gave it a Vaishṇavite orientation. The most interesting evidence on this point is provided by the Chakravikrama type coins of Chandragupta II. On its obverse is shown, inside a big *chakra*, a standing two-armed male figure conferring three round balls on a haloed royal figure. The reverse shows the figure of Lakshmī standing on a lotus and the legend *Chakravikrama*. It is unanimously believed that the figure inside the *chakra* represents the *Chakrapurusha* or Vishṇu who is bestowing on Chandragupta II three symbols of royal power, viz., *prabhu śakti*, *utsāha śakti* and *mantra śakti* i.e. the kingly virtues of authority, energy and counsel.[4] The symbology of this scene becomes clearer in the light of data provided by the *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā*, a well-known text of the Pāñcharātra Āgama which, "on the basis of the internal evidence bearing on the religious conditions portrayed in it, should be assigned to

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
2. *Vāyu Purāṇa*, XLVII. 72-76.
3. Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, III, pp. 63 ff.
4. Altekar, *Coinage*, pp.147 ff.; Sivaramamurti, *JNSI*, XIII, Pt.II, pp.180 ff.; Agrawala, V.S., *JNSI*, XVI, Pt.I, pp. 97 ff.

the Gupta period.''[1] From it we learn that Vishṇu in the form of *Chakra* was held as the ideal of worship for kings desirous of obtaining universal sovereignty. In the words of V.S. Agrawala, it was ''a novel and dynamic interpretation compatible with the polity of the times. According to the explanation given in the *Saṁhitā*, the human figure inside the *Chakra* is called *Chakravartī* both by the people and the wisemen. The king who worships him with a devout heart attains to the rank of a *Chakravartī* ruler in a short time. Those who wish for greater glory (*vipulāṁ śriyam*) should worship the *Chakravartī Purusha*, but specially is this worship enjoined on kings. It was a new conception by which the Pāñcharātra Bhāgavatas utilised the tenets of their religion in the service of the state and thereby greatly influenced the political thought and ideals of kingly power during that period.''[2] The *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā* clearly states that he who adores the *Chakravartī Purusha* becomes a *Sārvabhauma* or universal ruler in this world and also becomes a ruler in the other world. Anyone who does not pay homage to this deity cannot attain to royalty.[3] It is indeed a welcome addition to our knowledge of the political philosophy of the imperial Guptas.

Thus, we find that the Gupta rulers and their rivals, being the products of different religious traditions, believed in different ideals. This difference in their ideals influenced their mutual relations to some degree. For example, the Vākāṭaka rulers were staunch Śaivas. Pravarasena I, despite the performance of the Vedic sacrifices, constructed a temple of the lord Śiva which became famous by the name of Pravareśvara. Rudrasena I claimed to be a great devotee of Mahābhairava while Pṛthvīsheṇa I and Pravarasena II are described as the most devout worshippers of god Maheśvara. But Rudrasena II, the son of Pṛthvīsheṇa I and the husband of Prabhāvatīguptā, was an exception. He became a devotee of the lord Chakrapāṇi, a form of Vishṇu.

1. Agrawala, *op.cit.*, p. 97.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
3. *Ibid.*

He even claimed that he acquired abundance of glory through the favour of god Chakrapāṇi (*Bhagavataś-Chakrapāṇeḥ-prasād-opārjjita-śrīsamudayasya*).[1] Now, Rudrasena II flourished in a period when the Gupta influence on the Vākāṭaka court was at its highest. That is why it is commonly and rightly believed that Rudrasena II's conversion to Bhāgavatism was the result of the influence of his father-in-law, Chandragupta II.[2] It was clearly a case of weaker partner of the alliance accepting the faith of the senior partner. In this context it is also significant to note that till the conversion of Rudrasena II, the bulk of the state expenditure assigned for religious purposes was utilized in the performance of the Vedic sacrifices. On the other hand, during the period of the ascendancy of Vaishṇavism in the Vākāṭaka court, the Bhāgavatas became its principle beneficiaries.[3] It was due to such patronage, rendered possible by the political influence of the Guptas, that in the Gupta age the geographical orbit of Vaishṇavism extended remarkably on all sides.[4]

Here, let it be clearly understood that we are not suggesting that the Guptas imposed their faith forcibly upon their contemporaries or fought wars with the specific purpose of enlarging the sphere of influence of their religion. We merely wish to point out that their political ideals were different from those of their main rivals and that, while dealing with them, they did not cease to think as the devotees of Vishṇu. After all, when Samudragupta chose Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Vishṇu and the mythical enemy of the *Nāgas*, as the emblem of his family, was he not betraying the fact that while thinking of his Nāga adversaries his attitude was coloured, however lightly, by his Bhāgavata affiliation? Similarly, when Skandagupta declared that he plucked and utilised the authority of his local representatives, who were so many Garuḍas, and used it as

1. Fleet, *Corpus*, III, p. 237.
2. *NHIP*, p.110; Jayaswal, K.P., *Hist.Ind.*, p. 99 f.
3. Cf.Mirashi, *Vākāṭaka Rājavaṁśa ka ltihāsa tathā Abhilekha*, Varanasi, 1964, pp. 72 ff.
4. Cf. Goyal, Shankar, 'Political Ideology of the Early Imperial Guptas', in *Reappraising Gupta History for S.R. Goyal*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 215-23.

an antidote against the hostile kings, who were so many serpents, lifting up their hoods in pride and arrogance,[1] was he not looking upon his enemies with the eyes of a Vaishṇava?

Expression of the Vaishṇava Chakravartī Ideal in Art

The Vaishṇava concept of a Chakravartī ruler found allegoric expression in Gupta art as well. Apart from the depiction of Lord Chakrapurusha on the Chakravikrama type coins of Chandragupta II, the personification of Vishṇu's *chakra* is depicted in sculpture as well, As suggested by Asher, the personification of Vishṇu's wheel in Gupta art was intended to convey a political as well as the more apparent religious meaning. During the Gupta period at Pawaya and Eran are found wheels with a male figure sculptured against each side. The one at Eran still remains at the summit of a pillar; the pillar from Pawaya now in the Gwalior Museum, originally stood in such a location.[2] Similar wheels were erected at Salar in Murshidabad district, West Bengal, and at Enda in West Dinajpur district, of the same state, both products of the sixth century.[3] The most obvious meaning of these images is that they represent the personification of *chakra*, the weapon of Vishṇu. But their significance is probably much more. In the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* the wheel is said to represent the rotation of the world, the Wheel of the Law, the Wheel of Time, and the circular path of the planets.[4] The Chakravartī whose very name means wheel-turner, in concept followed the path of an ever-turning wheel, extending the righteous rule to the four quarters. Thus, in Vaishṇavism on one level the wheel was simply one of Vishṇu's attributes, but on another level it was a symbol of a universal monarch. A great wheel elevated high on a pillar evoked a vision of the universal

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1. Fleet, *Corpus*, III, p. 62.
2. Asher, Frederick M., in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, p. 59.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
4. *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, ed. Shah, Priyabala, Gaekwad Oriental Series, Baroda, Vol.130, p.183; also Vol. 137, p. 141.

righteous king, the Chakravartī.[1] The inscription on the pillar upon which the Eran wheel stands—and presumably the inscription of the other pillars as well—refers to the dedication of a Vishṇu temple, and so the wheel serves as an appropriate emblem to stand before the temple.[2] No one seeing the wheel and reading or hearing the inscription could fail to recall that the wheel is the emblem of the universal monarch, the Chakravartī. "By implication, of course, it is the dedicator of the temple, the reigning monarch who is to be seen as the righteous universal monarch."[3]

Another allegory in stone which throws light on the political thinking of the Gupta emperors is the depiction of Varāha incarnation of Vishṇu. One such shrine found at Udayagiri is deservedly famous. It is a rock-cut image of Varāha of colossal size, standing as a powerful human figure with a boar's head shown in profile. He is lifting the earth from beneath the cosmic waters. According to an inscription on a wall adjacent to the great relief, this great Vaishṇava shrine was dedicated in 402 A.D. during the reign of Chandragupta II by one of his feudatory kings.[4] Its symbolism has been discussed by V.S. Agrawala and many others.[5] Viewed in historical context, the relief seems to serve as a remarkable allegory for the unification of the empire under Chandragupta II. Before the fundation of the Gupta empire, there was in North India almost total political chaos which, to the people of the Gupta age, would have seemed akin to the dismal state at the end of an age of the world. This chaotic state was brought to an end by the Guptas. Although the Gupta empire had been expanded almost to its full extent during the reign of Samudragupta, large parts of Western India (including Malwa, the very area in which Udayagiri is located) remained under the authority of the Western

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1. Asher, *op.cit.*
2. Fleet, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-90.
3. Asher, *op.cit.*, p. 61.
4. Fleet, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-25.
5. Agrawala, V.S., *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, pp. 333-35; Sohoni, S.V., in *JBRS*, LVII, pp. 49-56.

Kshatrapas until Chandragupta II brought them within Gupta rule. He thereby united virtually whole of Northern India under a single central authority, in a sense saving the world from chaos by unifying it just as Varāha did by uplifting the earth from submersion. If, as seems likely, the Udayagiri relief was inspired by Chandragupta's conquests and also serves as an allegory for his victory, then it provides cosmic perspective to a historical event.[1] The figures lined up along the back wall of the relief must represent, on a literal level, the sages who had gone between his bristles praising him. But, according to Asher, their ascetic garb, which at first glance appears to resemble the so-called northern dress that served as the costume of the Kushāṇa rulers, on a secondary level recalls the foreign rulers conquered by Chandragupta II.[2]

Further displaying the allegorical character of this relief is a pair of female figures who, as indicated by their *vāhanas*, are personifications of the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā. According to V.S. Agrawala, they represent the Antarvedī or Madhyadeśa,[3] the Gupta heartland. These rivers have their confluence at Prayāga (modern Allahabad), which the present writer has identified as the capital of the Gupta empire.[4] Further, on one level the ocean toward which these united rivers flow represents the primeval ocean from which Varāha rescued the earth. But, as the Sanskrit word for ocean is *samudra*, the ocean here may also recall Chandragupta II's father and predecessor, Samudragupta, the monarch who essentially established the Gupta empire by his famous victories.[5]

Elsewhere, too, images of Varāha have served as a metaphor for the monarch (as at Eran, from where is found an enormous but less impressive image of Varāha erected during the reign of Toramāṇa, a Hūṇa contemporary of the Guptas ruling in the early years of the sixth century),

1. Asher, *op.cit.*, p. 56.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Agrawala, V.S., *op.cit.*, p. 333.
4. Vasudeva Upadhyaya, Frederick M.Asher and many others agree with our view.
5. Asher, *op.cit.*, p. 56 f.

but nowhere is the allegory expressed in such magnificent visual terms as at Udayagiri.

Preference to Vaishṇava Faithfuls in the Appointment of Vassal Chiefs and Governors

Early Gupta emperors, especially Samudragupta and Chandragupta II, apparently gave perference to their followers with Vaishṇavite leanings while appointing governors or subordinate kings in the newly acquired regions. Pushyavarman who was, according to the epigraphic and literary records, the first ruler of the Varman family of Kāmarūpa and whose accession is placed about 350 or 355 A.D., appears to have been one of such vassal chiefs. The contemporaneity of Pushyavarman with Samudragupta and the subordination of the former to the latter is further proved by the fact that Pushyavarman, obviously out of devotion and loyalty to his overlord and patron, named his son and daughter-in-law after the great emperor and empress.[1] The kings of this Varman dynasty claimed to be staunch Vaishṇavas. According to Yuan Chwang, Pushyavarman's remote descendent Bhāskaravarman, the contemporary of Harsha, had descended from Nārāyaṇadeva (Vishṇu) while Bāṇa in his *Harshacharita* describes this king as belonging to a Vaishṇava family.

Samudragupta appears to have helped in the establishment of a Vaishṇava royal house at Daśapura also. The four records of the ruling family of this region have disclosed the names of its five kings. The dates of the first two of them viz. Jayavarman and Siṁhavarman are not known, but as the third and the fourth kings, Naravarman and Viśvavarman, were ruling respectively in 404 and 423 A.D., the dynasty most probably came into existence about 355 A.D. It was precisely the period when Samudragupta was reorganising the political set up of North India. It, therefore, becomes quite likely that the ruling house of Daśapura owed its origin to Samudragupta.

Like the Varmans of the Mandasor region the Vishnu brothers of the Eran inscription of G.E. 165, who obviously owed their royal glory to

1. *CA*, p. 90.

the Guptas, were Vaishṇavas. Similar seems to have been the case of the Sanakānīka mahārājas of East Malwa region. Even in the far western province of Surāshṭra we find that Parṇadatta, Skandagupta's governor in that province as well as Parṇadatta's son Chakrapālita, were Vaishṇava by faith. Obviously, the Guptas were more favourable towards the families with Vaishṇava affiliation.

In the Bundelkhand-Baghelkhand region the dynasties of the Parivrājakas, the Uchchakalpas, the Pāṇḍavas and the Varmans (these Varmans are known from the Shankarpur charter of Harivarman of 486 A.D.) also came into existence in the second half of the fourth century A.D. For most of them indications are available to assume that they were subordinate to the Guptas, at least in the early part of their history.[1] Further, most of them were supporters of Brāhmaṇical religion, in many cases Vaishṇavism. It was, therefore, natural that with them the ideology of the Guptas and the art-traditions of the core-area of the empire spread into the Bundelkhand-Baghelkhand region.

Spread of Vaishṇava Art in the Gupta Age

Thus, the inscriptions of the Gupta emperors, their vassals and other contemporaries show how the Bhāgavata or Vaishṇava creed spread and flourished in different parts of the Gupta empire and other regions, though there were other cults flourishing side by side. Alongwith the Bhāgavata creed the art-tradition of the Madhyadeśa also spread into other regions. Many inscriptions record the erection of temples in honour of Vishṇu under various names such as Chakrabhṛt, Janārdana, Śārṅgin, Muradvish, and others. The Tusam (Hissar dt.) inscription of the fourth century A.D. records the construction of two reservoirs and a temple for *Bhagavān* (Vishṇu). A Brāhmī inscription, engraved in a cave of the Susunia Hill (near Bankura, West Bengal) of about the fourth century A.D. records that the cave with the discus mark was dedicated by king Chandravarman of Pushkaraṇa, described as the foremost slave of

1. Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Gupta Sāmrājya kā Itihāsa*, pp. 121-25.

Chakrasvāmin (Vishṇu). The rock-cut cave shrine at Udayagiri near Sāñchī in Bhopal appears to have been a Bhāgavata one for the inscription dated G.E.82 (402 A.D.) recording the pious gift of the Sanakānīka feudatory of Chandragupta II, is engraved over two relievo-sculptures—one of the four-armed god Vāsudeva-Vishṇu and the other of a twelve-armed goddess. On a part of the facade of this cave shrine is carved the aforesaid figure of Varāha *avatāra* which also indicates its Bhāgavata affiliation. The Meharauli iron pillar inscription (near Qutb Minar, Delhi), mentioned above, records that the *Vishṇudhvaja* (flag-staff of Vishṇu—the pillar itself) was set up by king Chandra (identified by us with Samudragupta) 'having fixed his mind upon Vishṇu on a hill called Vishṇupada'. The fragmentary Mandasor inscription of Mahārāja Naravarman of Mandasor (who was obviously a feudatory of Chandragupta II) belonging to the Mālava year 461 (404 A.D.) was evidently a Bhāgavata record, for it begins with an invocation to the 'Purusha with thousand heads and immeasurable soul who sleeps on the waters of the four oceans as on a couch'. During the rule of Naravarman's son Viśvavarman, under the suzerainty of Kumāragupta I, Mayūrākshaka, a minister of the former, and his two sons Vishṇubhaṭa and Haribhaṭa caused to be constructed a lofty and beautiful temple of Vishṇu on the bank of the Garggarā in the (Mālava) year 480 (424 A.D.). Mayūrākshaka was a Bhāgavata showing extreme devotion towards the bearer of the *gadā* and *chakra* (Vishṇu). The Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta records the dedication of an image of the same god under the name of Śārṅgin (wielder of the Śārṅga bow) by the emperor himself to the memory of his father Kumāragupta I. The copper-plate inscription of the Gupta year 128 (488 A.D.) found at Baigram (Bogra district, Bangladesh) records a land-grant for daily worship in, and occasional repairs to, the temple of Govindasvāmin. The Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta records the erection of a temple of Vishṇu under the name of Chakrabhṛt by Chakrapālita, a devoted worshipper of Govinda and the son of the governor of Surāshṭra-*vishaya* under Skandagupta. A stone

inscription found at Gadhwa of the Gupta year 148 (468 A.D.) refers to the installation of an image of Anantasvāmin and some grant to the same god under another name Chitrakūṭasvāmin (Vāsudeva-Vishṇu). In the time of Budhagupta also Bhāgavatism and Vaishṇava art flourished in eastern and central India. The Damodarpur copper-plate inscription as well as Eran stone pillar inscription of his reign bear testimony to this fact. The two sectarian deities, viz., Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin, for whose images two temples were built according to the former record, were connected with the Bhāgavata cult. The latter opens with an invocation of the all-pervading 'four-armed god whose couch is the broad waters of the four oceans, who is the cause of the creation, continuance and destruction of the universe and whose ensign is Garuḍa'. It records that Mahārāja Mātṛvishṇu, who is described as excessively devoted to the Divine One (*atyantabhagavadbhakta*), with his obedient brother Dhanyavishṇu, had caused to be set up the flagstaff of the god Janārdana, the troubler of the demons. An inscription on the chest of a colossal red sandstone image of a Boar (representing Vishṇu in his Varāha incarnation) found there, records the construction of the stone temple of Lord Nārāyaṇa in this form by Dhanyavishṇu, the brother of Mātṛvishṇu.

In the Baghelkhand region the kings of the aforesaid Uchchakalpa dynasty like Jayanātha, Śarvanātha and others were patrons of the creed, for some copper-plate inscriptions (494-513 A.D.) found at Khoh refer to several Bhāgavata endowments by them. The shrine of the goddess Pishṭapurī (or Pishṭapurikā), the local form of Lakshmī, finds mention in some inscriptions. Grant to a temple of the same goddess by the Parivrājaka Mahārāja Saṁkshobha (529 A.D.) is recorded in another inscription found at Khoh; it begins with the twelve-syllabled Bhāgavata mantra—*Oṁ na-mo-bha-ga-va-te-Vā-su-de-vā-ya*. It is one of the earliest references to the holiest litany of the creed.

Many of the terracotta seal impressions unearthed in the course of excavations of the old sites of Bhita (near Allahabad) and Basarh (ancient

Vaiśālī) contain Vishṇuite emblems and inscriptions. Symbols such as the Kaustubhamaṇi or Śrīvatsa mark, shown on the breast of Vishṇu images, the attributes of Vishṇu like *śaṁkha*, *chakra* and *gadā* and the figures of Varāha and Narasiṁha *avatāras* are found on many of them. The goddess Lakshmī also appears on many sealings found at Bhita, Basarh and Rajghat (Benares). Some again bear such Vaishṇavite legends as *Śrī-Vishṇupadasvāmi-Nārāyana, Jayatyananto bhagavān Sāmbaḥ, Jitaṁ bhagavatonanatasyanandeśvarīvarasvāmiṇaḥ* and *namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya*, etc. The Poona copper-plate inscription of Prabhāvatīguptā, the queen of the Vākāṭaka king Rudrasena II and the daughter of the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II, as well as many South Indian inscriptions of this period begin with the invocation *jitaṁ bhagavatā*. Ruins of various temples as well as sculptures and reliefs found in places situated in such widely distant parts of India as Bhitargaon (Kanpur, U.P.), Gadhwa (Allahabad, U.P.), Deogarh (Jhansi district, U.P.), Mathurā (U.P.), Pathari (M.P.), Tigawa (M.P.), etc. show how popular Bhāgavatism had become in these regions.[1]

All the monuments and antiquities mentioned above (excepting the Meharauli iron pillar of 'Chandra') may be designated as 'Gupta' only because they were conceived and constructed while the Gupta dynasty was ruling, not because the Gupta emperors had any role in their construction. Actually, so far no palace or temple or monastery built by them has been found, what to talk of any city. From the Chinese records we indeed learn that the later Gupta emperors built several monasteries at Nalanda (*infra*), but none of these building is now extant. As regards sculptures, the earliest images which may be credited to any Gupta emperor are the Durjanpur Jaina images of Rāmagupta. Apart from them we have the Meharauli iron pillar of Chandra (who was definitely a Gupta emperor), the Bhitari pillar of Skandagupta and some other insignificant (from the point of view of art) pillars such as the Eran pillar of Samudragupta. Among these antiquities the Meharauli pillar is by far

1. *Comp. Hist. India*, III, Pt. II, pp. 780-85.

the most important and imposing remain of the period.

Here a reference may also be made to the gold coins of the Guptas in the production of which the role of the emperors must have been direct. In a way they may be looked upon as a branch of Gupta sculpture and sometimes provide interesting iconographic details for understanding the images of the period. For example, the Chakravikrama type of coins of Chandragupta II provide insight for a proper appraisal of Chakrapurusha images of the Gupta age.

Impact of the Buddhist Ideology on Politics and Art in the Age of the Later Imperial Guptas

From the above account it is obvious that the Guptas and many of their feudatories and contemporaries did a lot, consciously or unconsciously, for the expansion of Vaishṇavism or Bhāgavatism. However, though devout Vaishṇavas, the Guptas were quite tolerant in their religious outlook. In the later phase of the history of the dynasty, it appears that they came under the spell of Buddhist ascetic philosophy the influence of which tended to dampen their martial fervour, though officially they continued to profess faith in Vaishṇavism, and the policy of religious toleration was never given up. The change in this direction commenced probably in the closing period of Kumāragupta I's reign. The combined testimony of the literarary tradition and of his Apratigha type of coins on the obverse of which he is shown in the dress of a monk, strongly suggests that in his old age he practically became a recluse. In this connection it is interesting to note that the term *apratigha*, which occurs on the reverse of the coins of this type, though used in the epics and classical literature in the sense of 'invincible', had a definite Buddhist connotation also. For, in the Mahāyāna, *pratigha* or anger is mentioned as one of the six *kleśas* which cause bondage.[1] Therefore, in association with the depiction of Kumāragupta I on the obverse of these coins in the dress of a monk, the legend *apratigha* strongly suggests that the religion which attracted

1. Hardayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, p. 109; cf.also Altekar, *Coinage*, p. 358.

the attention of the old emperor was Buddhism and that when these coins were issued, he claimed to have become an *apratigha* or 'one who he is above anger'. It is perfectly consonant with what we know about the influence of Buddhism in the Gupta court in this period. From the testimony of Paramārtha, an Indian Buddhist scholar, who went to China in 537 A.D., we learn that king Vikramāditya sent his queen with the crown-prince Bālāditya to study under the famous Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu. As we have discussed elsewhere, these rulers were no other than Skandagupta Vikramāditya and his successor Narsiṁhagupta I Bālāditya, the son of Purugupta.[1] The influence of Vasubandhu (the Younger) on these rulers proved very consequential. According to Paramārtha, it induced Skandagupta, who had been a patron of the Sāṁkhya philosophy, to take interest in Buddhism. Perhaps it explains why in the *ĀMMK*, a Buddhist work, Skandagupta is described as 'the best, wise and religious king in that low age'.[2] As regards Narasiṁhagupta I, he became a devout Buddhist and according to Paramārtha, on becoming king after the death of Skandagupta, presumably in or shortly after 467 A.D., favoured Vasubandhu with special patronage. But this spell of Buddhism on the emperor did not prove beneficial for the empire, whatever might have been its spiritual advantage to him as an individual. For, from the *ĀMMK* we learn that 'after reigning without a rival and peacefully' he became a Buddhist monk and at the age of 36 years and 1 month committed suicide by *dhyāna*, swooning away.[3]

Aṭ one place Yuan Chwang gives a list of the patrons of the Nalanda monastery (*infra*) in which Bālādityarāja figures after Budhagupta. He was obviously different from Narasiṁhagupta I Bālāditya, the above-mentioned predecessor of Budhagupta. He, therefore, may be identified

1. *HIG*, Ch.III, App.V.
2. *IHI*, p. 33.
3. *Ibid*. Interestingly, according to the Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta, his father Kumāragupta I "by this own power (*ātmaśaktyā*) had attained the position of being a friend of the gods" i.e. died by his own power (Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 62). Did he also commit religious suicide?

with Narasiṁhagupta II Bālāditya who ruled in the early decades of the sixth century and was a contemporary of Mihirakula, the Hūṇa tyrant and notorious persecutor of the Buddhists. About Bālādityarāja Yuan Chwang has preserved an interesting tradition which throws light on the baleful influence of the world-renouncing Buddhist ideology on the imperial Guptas. According to this tradition, Bālādityarāja was an extremely devout Buddhist. He used to pay tribute to Mihirakula. But he refused to pay it when he heard about the cruel persecution of the Buddhists by Mihirakula. However, the defiant posture he adopted was neither the result of sober considerations of political and military situation and nor its consequences were met with courage and determination. Yuan Chwang, though he obviously had a soft corner for the Buddhist Gupta emperor, explicitly states that when Mihirakula raised an army to punish this rebellion, ''Bālāditya-rāja, knowing his renown, said to his ministers, 'I hear that these thieves are coming, and I cannot fight with them; by the permission of my ministers I will conceal my poor person among the bushes of the morass'. Having said this, he departed from his palace and wandered through the mountains and deserts. ...his followers amounted to many myriads, who fled with him and hid themselves in the islands of the sea.''[1] It was indeed a far cry from the days when Samudragupta boasted that his 'only ally was the prowess of the strength of his own arm', Chandragupta II led the campaign against the Śakas personally and Skandagupta, while fighting against the enemies of the dynasty, spent a whole night on the bare earth. It proves how disastrous from the political point of view the influence of Buddhism on the Gupta royalty proved to be.

But from the point of view of art-history of the period, the Buddhist leanings of the later Gupta emperors proved to be very beneficial. From the Chinese records we learn that in the period under discussion, Śakrāditya laid the foundations of the famous Buddhist University at

1. Beal, *Records*, I, pp. 168-69. Cf. the flight of king Lakshmaṇasena of the Sena dynasty, when he was informed of the invasion of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji.

Nalanda by building a monastery there. After him, the kings Buddhaguptarāja, Tathāgatarāja, Bālādityarāja, Vajra and a king of Central India (Yaśodharman of Malwa?) extended their patronage to this institution. The king Śakrāditya of this list has been identified by B.P. Sinha with Kumāragupta II,[1] for in the above list Buddhagupta is mentioned after Śakrāditya. But as the Chinese records give merely a list of the names of those kings who earned the credit of building monasteries at Nalanda, the rulers who had nothing to do with this institution have not been mentioned. Therefore, in view of the facts that 'Śakrāditya' is merely the translation of 'Mahendrāditya', the official title of Kumāragupta I, while the official title of Kumāragupta II was Kramāditya, it is better to assume that the foundations of this institution were laid by Kumāragupta I himself. It is consonant with what we know about his old-age religious leanings (*supra*).

After Kumāragupta I, Budhagupta turned out to be a great patron of Nalanda University. As the word Tathāgata is a synonym of Buddha, it is quite possible that Budhagupta, whom the Chinese records mention as Buddhagupta, built two monasteries at Nalanda which were, due to some confusion, attributed to two different rulers, Buddhagupta and Tathāgatarāja. After him Narasiṁhagupta II Bālāditya, who had to bear the fury of Mihirakula and during whose reign the empire was passing through a period of great crisis and financial strain, either due to his own devotion to the faith or under the pressure of the Buddhist Church, made "the East upto the sea decorated with chaityas" and built over "the whole land monasteries, orchards, reservoirs, gardens and pavalions".[2] In the Chinese sources he is specially remembered as a 'zealous' Buddhist[3] and the patron of the Nalanda convent.[4] The Nalanda inscription of Yaśovarmadeva also refers to a 'temple' built by king

1. *DKM*, p. 69.
2. *IHI*, p. 33.
3. Watters, *Travels*, p. 288.
4. Beal, *Life*, p. 109.

Bālāditya at Nalanda.[1]

To some extent under Kumāragupta I and his successors Jainism also flourished. The Kahaum and Udayagiri (Cave 20) inscriptions record "the interest of established members of society in Jainism. In the second case, a scion of a military family who calls himself *ripughna* or 'enemy-killer' announces that he himself adheres to the path of ascetics. The Kahaum pillar most vividly ascribes the dedication of five carvings of Tīrthaṁkaras to the donor's *malaise* with the world's changes. From such evidence, a picture emerges of both popular and royal interest in ideologies that prescribe an immediate, certain escape from the troubles of this existence in the form of an ascetic way of life."[2] It is understandable that ascetic beliefs should have prospered from the second half of the fifth century onwards, a time of troubles. "Such developments are important, for there was an efflorescence of Buddhist art at this point, one that has puzzled scholars who thought in terms of an exclusively Vaiṣṇava dynasty."[3]

1. *EI*, XX, pp. 43 ff.
2. Williams, Joanna G., *The Art of Gupta India*, p. 67.
3. *Ibid*.

Chapter Two

On Way to Gupta Classicism

[Conceptually, the Gupta classicism was the ultimate product of the so-called Elite and Folk interaction. Physically, the journey of 800 years, from 3rd century B.C. to 500 A.D., was from gross to subtle, visual weight to visual weightlessness, and a search for ideal image in terms of *yoga* and spiritual quest.]

Introduction

There existed in India from the very beginning a close interaction between the so-called 'elite' and 'folk' arts. However, these two kinds of art did not operate in complete isolation. It is perhaps true that the subject-matters of the 'folk' terracottas and of the 'elite' stone sculptures are not identical; all the gods and goddesses represented in the terracottas are not found in stone sculptures and also *vice-versa*. However, they did overlap much more when the art of terracotta produced large plaques like those in stone. While the elitist art tried to draw upon the folk art it was highly selective, limited to those items which it could easily incorporate and assimilate in its pantheon. For example, the worship of nāga or serpent entered Buddhism when Buddhism created the story of Muchalinda, a nāga, in which the king of serpents gives protection against torrential rains to the sleeping Buddha at Bodhgayā by spreading his hoods. It entered Vaishṇava cult when the concept of Seshanāga was evolved, in which Vishṇu was shown reclining on a bed of coils of the body of the serpent called 'Seshanāga'. Similarly in Jainism, Pārśvanātha is shown with a serpent spreading his hoods over his body. On the other

hand, we find that the figurines of female goddesses with wings, which figure prominently in terracotta art from 2nd cent. B.C., did not find a place in stone sculpture. It is quite clear to us that the predominant thought underlying this phenomenon was cosmogony and not cosmology. Similarly, while a large number of crudely modelled devatā and devī images in terracotta, starting from the first century A.D., dominated the scene of the Gaṅgā basin sites for four centuries, the same did not find a place in stone sculpture.

These elements of early art reflect the social scenario of the growing urbanisation in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā *doāb* and the Gaṅgā basin beyond Prayāga. In this scenario the folk elements coming from the rural and traditional background played a very important, rather inevitable, role but not the dominant role of the social and cultural leadership which remained in the hands of priestly and ruling classes of the Brāhmaṇas and the Kshatriyas.

The act of choosing and picking up folk elements in order to incorporate them in the elitist and organised religions depended on the ruling classes. However, from our studies it has become clear that the model which presupposes two distinct worlds, one of the so-called "Little Tradition" and the other of the so-called "Higher Tradition", is far from the realities of history and archaeology, even though the so-called folk or little tradition had certain elements which were predominantly, if not exclusively, non-elitist, at least to begin with.

The reason for this historical situation of the third and fourth centuries, as it existed in northern India, lies perhaps not so much in the so-called urban-rural dichotomy as in the Vedic and non-Vedic traditions. After all, it is a matter of common knowledge that for more than a thousand years after the decline of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation the Vedic traditions operated both amongst the illiterate and the literate folks; there being no urban centres in India between 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C. If one takes the Vedic tradition as the Higher Tradition and the non-Vedic tradition as the Little Tradition then the very definition of 'Higher' and

'Little' may be questioned since Higher and Little Traditions existed both among the elite and the folk.

But things began to change perceptibly around the 5th century B.C. when Buddhism and Jainism came face-to-face with the Vedic tradition. In other words, in the so-called Higher Tradition besides the Vedic tradition, now emerged two equally powerful non-Vedic traditions, Buddhism and Jainism, though inevitably both drew considerably upon the Vedic sources also because their cultural background was the same, namely, the Later Vedic. By the second century B.C., however, the Vedic thought-process developed a new dimension due to the impact of *bhakti* or devotion for personal gods through sets of rituals woven round images made of materials like clay, metals, bone and stone, which is generally called Neo-Brāhmaṇism, though erroneously.

It is this Vedic, the so-called Neo-Brāhmaṇic, Buddhist and Jain currents of the ever-flowing Indian culture which formed the backbone of the art traditions till the Kushāṇa period. That is why the art was much less sectarian than it is often believed; the sectarian denominations were only for the faithfuls. The art symbols, art styles, cosmogonical and cosmological ideas expressed through various myths and legends, all these formed a common reservoir of imagery which each religion drew upon. However, even during this period an undercurrent of beliefs and practices of localised nature, sometimes called 'folk', 'pagan' or 'shaman', continued to exist though it did not come into conflict with any pan-Indian religion. At the operational level it had only local applicability. In other words, 'folk' and 'classical' were only the two sides of the same coin existing together, though it is equally true that all that existed at the folk level did not have its roots in the Vedic tradition.

Terracotta Art : Stylistic Changes in Facial Features

The art of terracotta had one great advantage over the art of stone : the former could easily replace the later, obviously because of the inherent nature of clay which is pliable and plastic. The brick temples of

Bhitargaon, Ahichchhatrā, etc. decorated with terracotta plaques depicting religious and epic themes prove it.

From the 3rd century itself the Gandhāra region started using clay and stucco exactly for the same purpose for which terracotta was used in northern and eastern India — decorating temple-walls and making free-standing large images of gods and goddesses.

Thus a material like clay which, till the middle of the Kushāṇa period was almost exclusively used for making small figurines, was used as a substitute of stone from the late Kushāṇa and post-Kushāṇa periods for making large images not only in relief but also in the round. It made many things possible which were not possible earlier. For example, the use of a new style in clay made it possible for that style to be adapted into the other mediums, for example in bone, stone, metals, etc. The study of terracotta, therefore, gives a new insight into the problems connected with the transition from the Kushāṇa idiom to the Gupta idiom.

The stylistic changes first occurred in the shape of eyes, nose and lips. We have made several illustrations and introduced measurement techniques to demonstrate it.

Kushāṇa Gandhāra vis-a-vis Gupta Gandhāra

It is common knowledge that only about a dozen inscribed and dated Gandhāra sculptures are now available and even in them dates are given without reference to any era. Thus, we have no knowledge of their exact dates.

In the Mathurā School also the same problem exists since the sculptures here also are dated in years, from 1 to 380, but without reference to any era.

Here, we have followed the generally held view that the accession of Kanishka marked the beginning of the era of 78 A.D. and that the early Kushāṇa images are dated in this era. However, dating the images of the transitional period from the Kushāṇa to Gupta is not an easy task.

The main phase of the Kushāṇa rule in India ended in the middle of the 3rd century A.D., since in the year 241 A.D. the Sassanian rulers

of Iran defeated the Kushāṇas. However, the Kushāṇa dynasty was finally destroyed by the Hūṇas led by Mihirakula in the beginning of the 6th century A.D. (c.515-35 A.D.) The problem for the art historian arises when he makes stylistic studies within the strict jacket of this broad dynastic periodization. He, therefore, has no option but to base his chronological conclusions mainly upon stylistic considerations.

In the Gupta age Gandhāra witnessed the impact of the Gupta style. Marshall had called it ''Indo-Afghan'' style, a term which he applied mainly to the stucco images of this period found at several sites of Afghanistan. In fact, it was only 'Provincial Gupta Gandhāra', like the 'Gupta Vākāṭaka' or 'Gupta Maitraka', since the basic elements of art style remained the same which we see at Mathurā and Sarnath.

The Gupta era starts in 319 or 320 A.D. but the earliest Gupta sculptures are to be dated only during the last few decades of the fourth century A.D. Thus, the broad time-bracket for our study of the transitional phase from Kushāṇa to Gupta ranges from 250 A.D. to 400 A.D. Art styles keep on changing at different places at different points of time. It is easily understood when we concentrate on regional variations of the Gupta art. In the core-area of northern India, Uttar Pradesh in particular, changes started appearing at least 50 years earlier.

Directional Changes in Art Styles of the Transition Period

Firstly, in coiffure. The hair styles undergo stiff selection in the Mathurā and Sarnath schools but not in Gandhāra where sweeping wavy lines and small pointed locks of hair continue to be the most popular ones. In Mathurā and Sarnath round curls were arranged all over the head of the Buddha. Starting in the late Kushāṇa period, it became the most popular style although a few variations were also in vogue. The Kapardin style of hair-do does not survive the Kushāṇa period, primarily, perhaps, due to the fact it was based on the form of coiled *jaṭās* used by Śiva and Śaiva ascetics.

The short round curls of hair became a Mahāpurusha *lakshaṇa* with the Buddhists. Buddha as a monk with shaven head was rarely liked

by the Buddhists. The notion of his princely birth with beautiful hair had greater appeal to them. It is not without reason that the Pāla Buddhas are often crowned Buddhas with beautiful tiara. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand that the Bodhisattva form of the Buddha was always admired by the Buddhists. However, it was, perhaps, also due to the fact that Vishṇu and the Vaishṇava gods were shown wearing *mukuṭas*; hence the Buddhists could hardly lag behind even on this count.

Secondly, the costume. The system of overlapping broad pleats, which covered only the left shoulder in the original Gandhāra style, was slowly and gradually giving place to string-like 'pleats' at Mathurā, covering one or both the shoulders. At Sarnath, however, the pleats of all kinds — broad, string like, narrow, etc.— were done away with. The underlying idea in both the styles was to reveal the contours of the youthful, warm and radiating flesh as well as the garments worn below the *saṅghāṭī*. It was, however, not easy to reveal the flesh and also control its voluptuousness. In the mature Kushāṇa art voluptuousness was at the height, as can be seen in the Yakshī images from Mathurā, because the Śuṅga tradition in this respect was technically made more refined. In the Gupta art, the element of voluptuousness was finally controlled by adopting two methods; first, discarding the element of sexual nudity and second, adopting *yogic* posture and facial serenity.

Thirdly, the moustache. The moustache of the early Gandhāra Buddha images, occasionally seen in Mathurā, is now completely non-existent.

Fourthly, the eyes. In the Kushāṇa art these were centrally opened with the thick and fleshy upper and lower eye-lids prominently visible. But these were three-fourth closed in the transitional phase with the upper lid covering a large part of the eye, leaving either a slit in the centre or one-fourth part of the lower portion of the eye open. It is sometimes called 'Yoga' style with eyes concentrating on the tip of the nose and breath held in the broad and bulging chest.

Fifthly, the jewellery items. Profused jewellery, which adorned

the male and female figures from the Śuṅga times till the Kushāṇa period, gave place to just a few necklaces, ear-rings, bangles and arm bands.

Finally, the facial features. In the early Gupta-Vākāṭaka art expressiveness of the facial features coupled with delicate postures, involving new languages of gestures, lines and colours at places like Sarnaṭh and Ajanta is an important feature; the Kushāṇa art was deficient in this regard.

Some Related Media

Numismatic Art : The study of the coins of the Kushāṇas in terms of figural art is revealing as far as the transitional period is concerned. The images of the Kushāṇa kings influenced the images of the early Gupta kings on their coins but not the images of gods and goddesses. The images of gods and goddesses on the reverse of the coins of the early Gupta kings have their roots in the general imagery which was developed in the Śuṅga period and which continued to develop through the indigenous folk media such as terracotta. In fact, the whole thesis of unilinear development of Indian art, nearly divided into dynastic brackets, falls to the ground the moment we go into the depth of the Kushāṇa-Gupta transition.

The most important phenomenon of the transition period was not so much the fall of the Kushāṇas as the birth of local dynasties which were conquered by Samudragupta more than a hundred years later. The disintegration of the Kushāṇa empire meant poverty and poverty meant loss of patronage and financial resources for the artists; hence fall in innovations. But it also meant a rethinking over the choices of the kings of an alien dynasty. In fact, it meant rejection of certain significant items, such as, what is called by Rosenfield as the 'Dynastic Art of the Kushāṇas' in which statues of kings were made and worshipped. But the early Gupta kings could not discard the tradition of putting their portraits on coins; rather they further popularised it. Actually there was a significant departure in the art of portraiture. This departure took place during the transition period. The process of Indianization had started in the time of

the Kushāṇa king Vāsudeva but it could not depart too much from the Kushāṇa norms.

The norms of the art of portraiture of the Kushāṇa period as found on their coins had three parameters : first, it was hieratic, hence in accordance with the strict royal norms as observed in the court; second, in it the king was attired in formal royal dress; and third, it was emotionless. These norms witnessed a change in the Gupta age. The portraits became free from the courtly mannerism. Emotion entered into the facial expression. King's multifaceted personality was exhibited through various animated features. However, anatomical precision of the Hellenistic art was revived.

Architecture : It is generally held that the temple architecture in India started in the Gupta period and in the Buddhist context for which Temple No. 17 at Sāñchī has been repeatedly quoted because of its utter simplicity — a small flat-roofed cell or *garbhagṛha* and an equally small porch or *maṇḍapa* in the front, using typical early Gupta period octagonal shafts or columns rising from high square bases, and surmounted by inverted lotus capitals topped by massive abacus decorated with crudely carved figures, sitting back to back on haunches; the abacus carried the stone used for the flat roof of the porch.

It is, however, recognised by scholars like Benjamin Rowland that this architectural form was not exclusively Buddhist; the Hindus also used it for their temples. But what is important is the birth and growth of *śikhara*. The subject has been extremely controversial amongst scholars. However, it was a great point of departure from the Kushāṇa tradition. The concept of *śikhara* was a gift of the transition period since the imperial dictate loosened the Buddhist hegemony itself. The Durgā temple at Aihole and the Vishṇu temple at Deogarh, both of the Gupta period, have imposing *śikharas* though short in height and small in dimension. Obviously, the *śikhara* had an earlier beginning.

On Way to Gupta Classicism

The transition from the Kushāṇa style to the Gupta style is marked by the

following characteristic features :

Ideational :

1. From emphasis on body, bordering voluptuousness, to emphasis on spiritualness.

2. From outward looking icons to inward looking icons.

Sectarianism :

1. More centres of art devoted to Bhāgavata and Śaiva cults.

2. More icons of Mahāyāna deities at Buddhist centres than ever before.

3. Less emphasis on Śālabhañjikās and Yakshīs engaged in pastime than in the Śuṅga-Kushāṇa period.

Constructional :

1. Loss of railings on the platforms of the stūpas.

2. Beginning of roof-with-*śikhara* temples in place of gabbled roof *chaityagṛhas*.

3. Pillars and pillar-decorations, both floral and geometrical, increase in place of humans who pay only supportive roles.

Terracottas :

1. With the advent of Vaishṇava and Śaiva brick temples in the Gaṅgā basin and the *doāb*, large terracotta panels in high relief replaced stone plaques.

2. Large icons in the round also replaced stone sculptures in the round in this region.

Coins :

1. The portrait art dealing with kings on coins received expanded dimensions in terms of pastimes in which the kings were shown engaging themselves.

2. Indigenous costumes started replacing the Turanian dress.

Role of Literature :

1. Epics and Purāṇas become important sources of themes for artists dealing with Vaishṇava and Śaiva temples.

2. Bodhisattvas start playing greater role than the Buddha although his supremacy continues.

Road to Classicism :

1. Loss of extra body weight in favour of ideal balanced body-built.

2. Weightlessness in body inspite of increase in volume.

3. *Yogamudrā* in icons' body; eyes concentrating on the tip of the nose, broad and bulging chest as in *prāṇāyāma*, *padmāsana*, etc.

4. Fusion of body and mind in expression and attitude of icons.

5. Great animation in figures combining to depict narrative situations.

6. All postures depicting various profiles.

7. Emphasis on poise and gaity in figures of men and animals.

8. Gestures and *mudrās* increase in variety and forms.

9. Use of soft, whitish sandstone at Kauśāmbī alongwith buff sandstone.

10. Attempt to combine the Mathurā and Sarnath idioms at Kauśāmbī.

Chapter Three

Art of the Guptas and Their Contemporaries : An Overview

Among the most useful and important documents for the history of ancient India are the surviving monuments. Like written documents—inscriptions and literature—they may be analyzed and interpreted, and when properly read, they provide invaluable insight. Like written documents, they cannot be examined in isolation but must be viewed with other evidence for the character of an age.

Art Remains of the Gupta Realm

No one would argue that everyone of the monuments made in ancient India are known today. But the number of those that survive may tell us something. For example, from the time of the early Kushāṇa monarchs, a great many images from Mathurā are known, while the number there is significantly smaller during the third century. That may mean that resources for the support of artists became limited or that artists worked less frequently in durable material such as stone. Similarly, from the opening decades of Gupta rule, few images survive, perhaps because resources were committed to consolidating the realm. The result for the history of art is that this transitional period is difficult to document.

Rare though they are, however, images of the fourth century do survive, and often they are extremely important. These images are mostly from sites that had a long history of artistic activity, primarily in an area extending from Mathurā due south through Vidiśā, not necessarily an area recognized as the Gupta heartland but one where work in stone had

a long history, for example, during the Sātavāhana times at Sāñchī. A disproportionately large number of Gupta inscriptions as well as monuments thus survive in this area. Among the important early Gupta works is a pillar from Mathurā illustrating a tall *triśūla* with a small male figure, perhaps its personification, standing at the base. This relief bears an inscription with a date corresponding to 380/81 A.D., during the reign of Chandragupta II, and refers to teachers who likely belonged to the Lakulīśa sect,[1] evidence far more substantial than any work of literature for the existence of Pāśupatas at Mathurā during this time. Equally important are three Jaina sculptures discovered at Vidiśā, each bearing nearly identical inscription from the time of Rāmagupta, a king whose identity, indeed whose very existence, was debated until the discovery of these figures.[2] They also provide evidence, together with somewhat later sculptures at nearby Udayagiri Hill, for the presence of a Jaina community in this area.

At Udayagiri, on the outskirts of Vidiśā, is a series of remarkable rock-cut shrines, the earliest large-scale works of the Gupta period. Carved during the opening years of the fifth century, there are both Hindu and Jaina shrines. Most imposing is the Vishṇu temple comprised by the enormous relief image of Varāha, the god in his boar incarnation, and the adjacent wall with figures flanking the entrance to the temple's sanctum. The sculpture of Varāha, by far the largest Gupta relief, may have been intended as a visual metaphor, drawing an analogy between the god in this incarnation who set the world aright and the reigning dynasty, which brought order out of the chaos that likely resulted from the political vacuum during the final days of Kushāṇa rule. Several other aspects of the relief support this interpretation, as does the dedicatory inscription of 401/02 A.D. in which a local monarch indicates his

1. Chhabra, B. Ch. and Gai, G.S., eds., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, Vol. III of *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, New Delhi, Archaeological Survey of India, 1981, pp. 234-42.

2. *Ibid.*,pp. 231-34.

subservience to the Gupta overlord, recalling the sages of the relief who offer obeisance to Varāha.[1]

Higher on the hill is a Jaina temple, also a rock-cut shrine. It dates not much later than the Vaishṇava shrine below as indicated by an inscription of 425/26 referring to the dedication of an image of Pārśvanātha, one of the rock-cut reliefs in the shrine.[2] That sculpture is now seriously damaged, but details of its iconography remain evident. The other reliefs of this sanctuary are probably close in date. Also closely contemporary with this is another temple of Udayagiri, the so-called "false cave" temple[3] that has in its sanctum the vestige of a tīrthaṅkara image. With its porch (*maṇḍapa*), whose superstructure is supported by four pillars, standing before the partially constructed partially rock-cut sanctum (*garbhagṛha*), this monument has the basic components of a developed temple.

Whether or not to refer to these shrines of Udayagiri as temples is largely a semantic issue. These rock-cut monuments, on the outskirts of Vidiśā, have the essential form of a temple and suggest that during the first quarter of the fifth century, when they were excavated, the basic temple form was known. In fact, there is little reason to doubt that the early Gupta temples represent continuity in a tradition rather than an innovation, a notion better supported by earlier relief sculptures and foundations rather than by fully standing monuments. What is new, then, is the use of carved stone for the building material, more durable than materials earlier used.

Closely related to the "false cave" temple at Udayagiri and only a

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1. The allegorical character of the relief is discussed in greater detail in Asher, Frederick M., 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art', in Smith, Bardwell L., ed., *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, pp. 55-57.

2. Mitterwallner, Gritli v., 'The Pārśva of the Inscription in Cave 20 at Udayagiri (M.P.)', in Asher, Frederick M. and Gai, G.S., *Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art*, New Delhi, Oxford and IBH, 1985, pp. 95-103.

3. Agrawala, P.K., *Gupta Temple Architecture*, Varanasi, Prithivi Prakashan, 1981, pp. 37-39, figure 30.

few kilometers north of it is a shrine at Sāñchī, the famous Buddhist site, commonly called by its archaeological name, Temple 17.[1] In front of the simple flat-roof sanctum is a porch supported by four pillars. The exterior walls are entirely unrelieved by sculpture, the only adornment being confined to the area around the doorway. There the floral motifs are so sufficiently close to those of the Vishṇu shrine at Udayagiri dated 401/02 that it cannot be far removed in time. Since this shrine is in the heart of a Buddhist monastery, there is no reason to doubt that this is a Buddhist temple, but its form so closely follows the evolution of Hindu temples that there is no reason to draw sectarian distinctions based on style. This is a consistent feature in the history of Indian art. That is, the style used for the temples and sculptures of one faith is not consequentially different from that of another. Style therefore is more appropriately conceived as Indian than associated with one or another of India's religions.

If Temple 17 at Sāñchī may be dated about 425, it would be appropriate to assign a date of about 475 to the temple at Nāchnā. It is significantly different. Before recent renovations, this stood as a two-storey temple, apparently a stage in the evolution toward the towering superstructures more common after the Gupta period. Its plinth is composed of unevenly carved stones, an allusion to Mount Kailāsa, appropriate for this temple of Śiva. A lattice window with frolicking *gaṇas* at the base relieves the north and south sides, while the doorway is elaborately conceived. A rich deeply cut lotus band frames the door; beyond it are panels of amorous couples, both references to creation/procreation. Other images carved around the doorway include personifications of Śiva's *triśūla* and of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā rivers. All these make the Nāchnā shrine characteristic of a fully developed Gupta temple. For example, the Śiva temple at Bhumarā has much in common with this one.[2] So does a Vishṇu temple at Maṛhiā, whose tiered

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40, figures 34-36.

2. Banerji, R.D., *The Temple of Śiva at Bhumarā*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. XVI, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 1924.

superstructure likely provides evidence for the original appearance of the one at Bhumarā.[1]

By far the most developed among the surviving temples of Gupta date is the one at Deogaṛh, built around 525.[2] The shrine sits on an elevated plinth adorned with reliefs depicting scenes from the great epics, perhaps symbolic of the realm of the epic heroes. Above this is the temple with its superstructure largely intact, a close precursor of the more fully developed *śikhara* seen on temples of the subsequent century. The doorway is even more ornate than the one at Nāchnā, and the walls of the remaining three sides are now adorned with magnificently rendered relief panels depicting Vishṇu: first momentarily waken from his cosmic slumber in the act of creation, then as Nārāyaṇa with the sage Nara, and finally in the liberation (*moksha*) of Gajendra, probably symbolic of the stages of life.[3]

Beside these temples of central India, other monuments were constructed in the Gupta realm. Among them was the fine brick temple of Bhītargāon,[4] the best preserved among brick temples constructed at that time. Some of the temples known only from inscriptions also probably were of brick, including several in eastern India, where brick continued to be a favored medium of construction almost to the present day. At Baigrām and Dāmodarpur, for example, both in Bengal, we have inscriptions bearing Gupta era dates that refer to temples no longer surviving.[5]

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1 Chandra, Pramod, 'A Vāmana Temple at Marhia and Some Reflections on Gupta Architecture', *Artibus Asiae,* XXXII, 1970, pp.125-45.

2. For a detailed discussion of the temple, see Vats, M.S., *The Gupta Temple at Deogarh,* Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. LXX, Delhi, Archaeological Survey of India, 1952. Cogent arguments regarding the temple's date are presented by Williams, Joanna G., *The Art of Gupta India,* Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 131-34.

3. Huntington, Susan L., *The Art of Ancient India,* New York, Weatherhill, 1985, pp. 208-11. She has brought superb insight to her analysis of this temple.

4. Agrawala, *op.cit.*, pp. 73-79, figures 71-75.

5. See Basak, R.G., 'Baigram Copper-Plate Inscription of the [Gupta] Year 128'

Indicative of the fragile nature of brick architecture is a shrine known as the Maṇiyār Maṭh constructed about the beginning of the sixth century at Rājgir.[1] When excavated, this brick building had a series of superbly rendered stucco figures in niches placed around a large cylindrical structure. Images of Vishṇu, Pārvatī, a liṅga and one of the earliest dancing Śiva images known were among the Maṇiyār Maṭh's sculptural adornment. Within a short time after excavation, however, all the stucco figures had disintegrated. The same fate has befallen the stucco reliefs of another brick monument, a temple dating to the seventh century at Aphsaḍ, also in Bihar.[2] Brick is thus a fragile medium, and its sculptural adornment characteristically fashioned from stucco is even more ephemeral. Thus we must recognize that only a small portion of the monuments comprising the Gupta corpus remains. In fact, it is not possible to conclude with certainty that what remains is characteristic of the works made.

All these temples may be described as Gupta only because they were conceived and constructed while the Gupta dynasty ruled, not because the royal family had any role in their construction. There is no known evidence for Gupta patronage of any Hindu temple. The monarchs did, however, provide funds for the great Buddhist monastery at Nālandā if we can accept the testimony of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang and the seals of Gupta kings found at the site.[3] While it is difficult to associate any known building or sculptural remain from Nālandā with the Gupta

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Epigraphia Indica, XXI, 1931-32, pp. 78-83, for reference to a temple of Govindasvāmin. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, pp. 360-64, presents the Damodarpur inscription that identifies a temple.

1. Asher, Frederick M., *The Art of Eastern India, 300-800*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1980, pp. 23-26, plates 17-20.

2. *Ibid.*, plates 83-86. These reliefs have almost entirely vanished.

3. For the account of Xuanzang, see Beal, Samuel, trans., *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, reprint ed., Delhi, Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1969, Vol. II, pp. 167-75. For the Gupta seals discovered at Nālandā, see Shastri, Hirananda, *Nālandā and Its Epigraphic Material*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 66, reprint ed., Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 1986, pp. 64-67.

period, the initial phase of the site almost surely may be viewed as a Gupta product in the literal sense of the term.

At Mathurā and Sārnāth, however, a number of surviving monuments may be assigned to the Gupta period. At Mathurā in particular continuous production may be traced from the Kushāṇa through the Gupta periods, though very few works may be assigned to the third and fourth centuries. But just as we see a significant resurgence of temple building activity in the fifth century, so at these sites we see evidence that considerable funds were provided for the development of Buddhist monasteries during this time. Many sensitively rendered standing Buddha images were carved from Sikri sandstone at Mathurā during the fifth century. These figures are generally erect and covered with a garment whose folds are indicated by raised lines. Delicate modelling defines the planes of the body and features of the face. The fifth-century date for these Mathurā images is confirmed by a figure, characteristic of them all, bearing a date corresponding to 434 A.D.[1] At Sārnāth, an equally large number of Buddha images is known. These figures tend to be more svelte than those from Mathurā and generally stand in a distinct déhanchment, giving a curve to the stance. The garments of these figures are shown without raised lines, though paint may have been used to suggest folds as well as other features of these and all other Gupta sculptures. Beside the many standing figures, a few seated ones are known from Sārnāth as well as several reliefs illustrating the life of the Buddha, a type that served as a model for subsequent depictions of the subject, for example, among works from the Pāla period in Bihar and Bengal. Sārnāth sculptures bearing dates 473/74 and 476/77 confirm the later fifth-century date of many works from this site of the Buddha's first sermon.[2]

1. Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 68, plate 61.

2. Rosenfield, John, 'On the Dated Carvings of Sarnath', *Artibus Asiae*, XXVI, 1963, pp.10-26.

Art Remains of Other Regions

The Gupta realm was not the only part of India in which important monuments of this time were produced. In the Deccan, for example, where the Vākāṭakas ruled, the famed site of Ajaṇṭā was significantly enhanced. A few sanctuaries hollowed from the cliff during the first century B.C. were probably all that constituted the Buddhist monastery of this place until the middle of the fifth century. Then, in an extraordinary flurry of activity during the reign of King Harisheṇa (c. 460-78), the site was expanded substantially.[1] Many additional monastic dwellings were excavated from the cliff, several of them adorned with magnificent mural paintings illustrating deities from the Buddhist pantheon and stories of the Buddha's previous lives (*jātakas*). These usually have cells for the monks and small shrines at the rear containing an image of the Buddha. Two of the chambers, Caves 19 and 26, are apsidal in plan and serve as temples, perhaps more accurately described as *stūpa* shrines. At the rear are large *stūpas* fashioned from the stone left while surrounding stone was removed to liberate the space that comprises the temple's interior. Unlike earlier *stūpa* shrines of rock-cut sanctuaries, large Buddha images adorn the *stūpas* of these two, and the facade of each shrine is richly adorned with images, many of them figures of the Buddha, that feature a pose and garment form recalling the near contemporary Buddhas of Sārnāth, though these are more heavy-set. Buddha images also were carved on the facade of some of the early shrines that formed the original monastery at Ajaṇṭā, as if to update these monuments excavated half a millennium earlier. Similarly other Buddhist sites of the Deccan, excavated before the Buddha was commonly depicted in anthropomorphic form, were updated with the addition of images, as we see, for example, at Kānheri and Kārle.

1. Several articles by Walter Spink address the activity at Ajaṇṭā during this time. Among them, see 'Ajanta : A Brief History', in Pal, Pratapaditya, *Aspects of Indian Art*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1972, pp. 49-58 and 'Ajanta's Chronology: Politics and Patronage', in Joanna G. Williams, ed., *Kalādarśana*, New Delhi, Oxford and IBH, 1981, pp. 109-26.

Bronze sculptures were cast in significant numbers during the Gupta age. Not all the bronzes survive. Probably many were melted down for the value of their metal, perhaps to be recast in the form of other sculptures, or as functional objects. But several Buddhist bronze sculptures of about this date were preserved in Tibetan monasteries and have recently been brought out. Among these is a fine standing Buddha today in the collection of the Asia Society, New York.[1] It is an image that recalls the Gupta sculptures of Mathurā, particularly the image of 434. At Pophnar, in a part of Madhya Pradesh that probably fell within the Vākāṭaka realm, a hoard of bronze Buddha images datable to the fifth century has been found.[2] Though their style is not uniform, these highly refined standing figures, with more attention to sensitive modelling than to line depicting detail, generally recall the fifth-century Buddha images of Mathurā. They stand erect, with no sway to the body as seen in contemporary works of Sārnāth. These figures, then, and the sculptures from Ajaṇṭā discussed above, suggest that while there are clear regional distinctions in style, dynastic dominion did not especially confine style.

In south India, nothing remains from the time the Guptas were ruling the north. Rather, it is just about the time we see a hiatus in the construction of stone temples in Gupta north India, particularly in Madhya Pradesh, that work in stone commences in the south. At Bādāmī, for example, rock-cut sanctuaries were excavated during the final quarter of the sixth century, almost immediately after the last known date of the last known Gupta monarch.[3] This was soon followed by free-standing stone temples, a great many of them, at Bādāmī itself as well as at nearby sites such as Mahākūṭ and Aihole. And in the country of the Pallavas, several rock-cut shrines may be assigned to the time of Mahendravarman

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1. Khandelavala, Karl J., ed., *Indian Bronze Masterpieces: The Great Tradition*, New Delhi, Festival of India, 1988, p. 45, figure 3.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-52.

3. Cave 3 at Bādāmī is dated 578 A.D. For this shrine and monuments at Mahākūṭa and Aihole, all works produced during the reign of the Chālukyas, see *Marg*, Vol. 32, *In Praise of Aihole, Badami, Mahakuta, Pattadakal.*

I, who ruled in the opening decades of the seventh century. Among these is the upper 'cave' temple at Tiruchirapalli, rather different in form from either the sanctuaries of Ajaṇṭā or the more nearly contemporary shrines of Bādāmī. Soon after these monuments of Mahendravarman's time come the five famous rathas of Māmallapuram, monoliths in the form of free-standing temples that likely are testimony to an earlier vital architectural tradition that no longer survives.[1]

If that tradition no longer survives, then we may justly wonder about other monuments that may not have remained. Were the Gupta temples, then, unique constructions of an enormously inventive age, or are they, rather, the surviving examples of a much more extensive and possibly varied architecture, one by no means confined to the Gupta realm? Does the excavation or construction of monuments in south India after the time of the Guptas imply that Gupta stone architecture and the sculptures of those temples served as a model for emulation in the south? Our view, it is true, must be shaped by what happens to survive. We may learn to read the monuments as historical documents. But in doing so, we must recall that by no means is our picture complete. Some of the most important documents may be yet undiscovered or perhaps even undiscoverable.

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1. For the Pallava rock-cut shrines, see Srinivasan, K.R., *Cave Temples of the Pallavas,* New Delhi, Archaeological Survey of India, 1964; for both Pallava rock-cut and structural monuments, see Srinivasan, K.R., 'The Pallava Architecture of South India', *Ancient India,* No. 14, 1958, pp.114-38.

Chapter Four

Art and Architecture in the Gupta Period

As a distinctive cultural epoch of great achievements, the Gupta period is called the Golden Age of Indian history. The long processed classical trends attained their culmination during the fourth-fifth centuries in all walks of life and its ideals. This fact is best demonstrated by the extant corpus of contemporary literature as well as the rich remains of art activity which flourished from the middle of the fourth century up to roughly the sixth century in a distinctive manner and style, which bespeak of its noble heights and overwhelming glories.

Temple Architecture of the Gupta Age

A study of the Gupta architecture relates mainly to our knowledge of Indian temple in its early phase of building activity.[1] Modest beginnings of the Hindu temple as late as the third-fourth century A.D. presents an anomaly in comparison to the well-developed earlier Buddhist monuments as well as the highly evolved medieval temples of imposing character. As we now know, it was only in early Gupta times that the temple building in masonry emerged out of its architectural obscurity. Archaeological remains of the Hindu temples of the pre-Gupta period have hardly survived. This position can largely be explained by the fact that stone and other imperishable materials were not then employed for erecting Brāhmaṇical sanctuaries and we are left to presume on the basis

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1. Agrawala, P.K., *Gupta Temple Architecture*, 1981; *Gupta-kālīna Kalā evaṁ Vāstu*, 1994; Krishna Deva, *Temples of North India*, Ch. II; Williams, Joanna, *The Art of Gupta India*; etc.

of rich literary references to temples in the pre-Gupta period of Indian history which are rather sketchy. The modest masonry shrine as it appears before us from the fourth century onwards was obviously of a recent origin. It shows rudimentary beginnings from the point of its plan, plainness of decoration, unassuming height and simple design of components. As a natural corollary, the emergence of the *new* shrine is to be supposed to coincide with the cultural awakening and culmination of the long-processed classical elements witnessed in the Gupta period when, with the fresh creative enthusiasm of the strong imperial rulers as well as of the people, temple building was taken up as a cultural movement all over the Madhyadeśa.

As a cultural period, the name Gupta is related roughly with the span of three centuries, i.e. from the fourth to the sixth. Thus, there is ample scope to see how the temple building evolved through successive stages of its architectural growth. Although only a limited number of Gupta temples have survived intact through the ravages of time and man and are in themselves mostly of simple architectonic design, they are admittedly the forerunners of the complex medieval temple. In a general way, the extant shrines belonging to the Gupta phase of temple architecture can be classified into two groups on the basis of the nature of their roofs, namely, (1) flat-roofed square cell, and (2) elaborate building with a high top or superstructure, called *śikhara*. Similarly, another grouping can be made with reference to their ground plan, i.e. (1) square chamber or cella with a pillared portico in its front, and (2) square cella provided with a covered path of circumambulation or walled cloister. Besides several other comparative elements, the above-mentioned two factors hold good, though in a general way only, in differentiating "early Gupta type" from the "late Gupta type" temples.

It was indeed with respect to the early type of these temples that Alexander Cunningham noted as early as 1874-77 the following most striking characteristics of the Gupta temple style :

(1) Flat roofs without spires.

(2) Prolongation of the door lintel beyond the ends of the jambs.

(3) Statues of the river goddesses Ganges and Yamunā guarding the entrance door.

(4) Continuation of the architrave of the portico as a moulding all round the building.

(5) Pillars with massive square capitals ornamented with half seated lions back to back, with a tree between them.

(6) Bosses of the capitals of a peculiar form, like beehives with short side horns.

(7) Deviation in plan from the cardinal points.

(8) Of the facade, the intercolumniation in the middle being wider.[1]

These fundamental observations made by Cunningham in finding out the set architectural norm underlying the building pattern and distinguishing characteristics of the early Gupta temple type represented by the Sāñchī, Eran, Tigawa and Udaigiri examples, have largely remained unmodified uptil now. But valuable discoveries made later have added to our knowledge of various architectural, sculptural and other details, general and peculiar forms, and their contribution to the growth of subsequent temple architecture. All the temples which can be dated in the Gupta period have some common architectural and sculptural features typical of the age. However, archaeological stratification cannot be of much help as these temples were not discovered in course of systematic excavations. For this our main guide, other than art style, are inscriptions which are however, available only in a few cases.

While probing into the antecedents of the Gupta shrine, we have shown elsewhere that a sort of masonry building type of model shrine is represented on a Bodhgayā bas-relief dating back to the first century B.C. It is a small room constructed of three walls of stone blocks with the

1. *Gupta Temple Architecture*, p. 29, citing it.

fourth side left open for the entrance. The flat roof above is made of a stone slab. On the basis of several inscriptions, this building may be identified as the *Gandhakuṭī-prāsāda* or a *Chaitya-kuṭī*, the latter word occurring in two dated Kushāṇa records from Mathurā inscribed (Years 16 and 17) on the Buddha image-pedestals which were installed therein. It indicates the continuity of this shrine type for several centuries before the same was taken up as the prototype for early Gupta flat-roofed temple.[1]

The first known examples of this type of building constructed in dressed stone masonry are at Sāñchī and Kunda. The Shankarmadha at Kunda (3 miles east of Tigawa, in Jabalpur district) is perhaps earlier of the two. It consists of a plain cella (*garbhagṛha*) measuring 5'7''x 5'10'' inside and 10'8''x 10' 10'' outside, almost a square, with a height about 10 feet. Each wall is not less than two and a half feet wide. The stone doorframe shows three recessed bands on either side and a lintel, all being almost plain and simple. Long stone blocks laid in dry masonry form a noteworthy feature of its construction. The roof itself was composed of two massive slabs clamped by metallic cramps. Although a pillared *maṇḍapa* or porch was added to this building at a subsequent date, which is now almost ruined, it is obvious that the same was not anticipated in the initial planning. Thus this small temple cella enshrined with a Śiva-liṅga, seems to represent a ''pre-maṇḍapa'' type nearest to the prototype seen in the Bodhgayā relief.

The Gupta temple (No. 17) sited near the Great Stūpa on the Sāñchī hill is also an unpretentious structure consisting of a single flat-roofed chamber but with a pillared porch in front. The cella itself is about 12 feet 9 inches square outside and 8 feet inside with the top rising upto a height of 13 feet. It is a well-balanced small lithic construction and represents indeed the model type perfected by the early Gupta architects with a view to fulfilling the ritual needs then thought essential in temple

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 20, Ill. 19.

worship. The entire building is rigorously plain both inside and outside except for the sculptured doorframe and *maṇḍapa* pillars. The four pillars with their massive capitals and campaniform above the octagonal shaft are externally the most attractive member of the architecture. As Cunningham observed, ''The flat roof, the square form, and the stern simplicity of this structural temple, all point to the rock-hewn cave as its prototype; and in the neighbouring hill of Udaigiri we have actual rock-hewn examples of this very style.'' Though no dated Gupta inscription is directly associated with this temple, a Sāñchī inscription of Year 93 (412 A.D.) may be taken as roughly contemporaneous with this temple.

At the Udaigiri hill, some five miles away from Sāñchī, we have an interesting group of rock-cut caves most of which are mere cells, excavated to enshrine the deity-images. Their earliest series is connected with the reign of Chandragupta II whose inscriptions appear on two of them, namely Cave 6 (dated Year 82=401 A.D.) and Cave 7 (undated). A third inscription of year 106 (=425-26A.D.) falling in the early reign of Kumāragupta I is in the ruined Cave 20, the solitary example of Jaina dedication at the site. Cave No. 7 is locally known as the Tawā Cave from its griddle-like rough top retained from the original ledge of the rock. Its noteworthy feature is a large lotus-flower carving (4 ft 6 inches in diameter) on the ceiling. Cave 6 (Chandragupta Cave) is similar to it as far as the inner size (14' x 12.5') is concerned but has no lotus ceiling. The main sculptural feature is its beautiful facade showing a richly carved *triśākha* doorframe flanked by large panels on either side containing doorkeepers and deity figures. Noteworthy are the two female figures carved on the level of the doorway lintel. Both of them have for their mount a crocodile as is invariably the case with such figures in the doorframe ornament at Udaigiri. However, the two figures appear iconographically differentiated for the first time in the two vertical panels flanking the colossal Mahāvarāha figure on the adjoining rock next to Cave 6. An almost identical scene is repeated on both the left and right sides of the Boar figure and has been identified by V.S. Agrawala as the

descent of the river-goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā from the heavens and their depiction as forming the two channels of the Central Country. Now Gaṅgā is riding a crocodile while Yamunā stands distinctively on a tortoise. In fact, this motif of the two river-goddesses came to decorate the Gupta doorframe in its further development.

Cave No. 1 (''False Cave'') at Udaigiri is partially rock-cut and has its front portico and one side wall built up of dry stone masonry. The inner cella is only 7 ft by 6 ft inside while the pillared portico is 7 ft square. Cave 4 (called Bina Cave by Cunningham) shows a similar cave-temple with a *maṇḍapa* now ruined but has an ornamental doorway. The Amṛta Cave (No. 19), the largest and perhaps the latest of the group here, presents a far more spacious and evolved conception (22 ft x 19 ft 4 inches inside) with its richly ornamented pillars and doorway, and may be referred to the date of the inscription of Year 106, i.e. 425-26 A.D. preserved in the Jaina Cave, which in fact lies high up in the hill just above this cave temple.

Contemporaneous with it was perhaps a structural temple the ruins of which were excavated at the top of the Udaigiri hill itself. This east-facing building had a spacious platform (roughly 118 ft x 70 ft) of cell-foundation and some architectural fragments surviving in its debris are stylistically akin to the sculpture of Cave 19.

The Kankali Devi temple at Tigawa, about 150 miles away from the Vidiśā group, presents another early example of a flat-roofed shrine with pillared portico. Its architectural proportions are similar to those of the Sāñchī temple. Originally a true prostyle, it was at a late date converted into a *templum in antis* by adding walls on the two sides. A definite advancement is seen in its highly ornate doorframe containing figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā surmounting its side jambs.

Several Gupta temple ruins discovered by Cunningham at Eran (Sagar district) appear to follow the same ground-plan of a square or rectangular *garbhagṛha*, preceded by a pillared portico. The earliest of them perhaps is the one dedicated to Narasiṁha, of which the dimensions

approximately were similar to those of the Sāñchī temple. The Varāha temple is dated by its inscription of the time of the Hūṇa ruler Toramāṇa (c. 500 A.D.) measuring about 42 ft x 20 ft externally and belonging evidently to a late phase of building activity at the site.

At present, some clear evidence regarding marked deviations from the early vogue of a moderate-sized square *garbhagṛha* with its small pillared porch is afforded particularly by the temple buildings at Madhia, Deogarh, Bhitargaon, Bhumara, Nachna Kuthara and Sakor. Each of them has its own peculiarity and we are face to face with a variety of rapid developments and innovations that were brought about within a short duration of four or five decades from c. 450 A.D. In a reasonable analysis of the entire available evidence, it is hardly possible to fix the exact sequence of various occurrences in the newly growing forms of architecture and their subsequent ramifications with respect to this most formative epoch of Indian temple architecture. We, therefore find eminent scholars differing in their chronological estimate of the above mentioned shrines, and in the order of diverse architectonic experiments and improvisations which each of these buildings appear to bear distinctively.

However, the most important features of new architectural evolution were primarily concerned with the following two areas of the sanctum :

(1) superstructure or śikhara[1]; and

(2) covered path of circumambulation (*bhramaṇī* or *andhāra*).

The small temple (about 8 ft x 8 ft square inside) at Madhia has no front *maṇḍapa*, but it is here that we have evidence of a sort of double or

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1. Regarding the evolution of early Hindu temple the most complex and controversial portion of the building is its Śikhara. Apart from some literary data, an idea of traditional shrine-superstructure may be had from several depictions on early coinage and reliefs. A punch-marked coin (Bodhinayaknoor Hoard) shows a four-pillared *maṇḍapa* with domical roof. Two coin-types of the Mitra rulers (c. 2nd-1st cent. B.C.) depict an arched building with a standing deity-image inside on a railed platform. A pillared *maṇḍapa* with two or three-storied domical roof, obviously of

timber work, occurs on an Audumbara coin-type (early 1st cent. A.D.). Mention may also be made of a Kosam clay-plaque (1st cent. B.C.) and several Mathurā reliefs (1st-3rd cent. A.D.) that depict designs of temple building with a storied or towered superstructure. Unique of its kind is a terracotta shrine-model from Newasa (2nd cent. A.D.) representing a saddle-type roof of wooden work. A 3rd-4th cent. Mathurā sculpture shows by far the most significant type of a temple,enshrining Buddha-image and having a stepped out arrangement of the superstructure with its semi-circular top-ridge and inward sloping contour of true curvilinear description. This outstanding evidence tends to indicate reasonably the existence of a high-rising typical curvilinear spire about the beginning of the Gupta period, but which could not have been much favoured owing to certain technical problems which the architects were yet to master fully in their handling of the masonry construction. All earlier experiments or vogues with a high roofing for a shrine were presumably in timber construction. Many attempts regarding stone or brick building with a high superstructure must have utterly failed before the evolution of sound techniques in masonry that served successfully to have the building intact from cracking down in face of the extra load of a high "śikhara". One finds resourceful Gupta architect making his advances in the direction of raising the sanctum height with a very careful planning. With his initial attempts meeting practical failures, several temples having heavy roofing must have cracked down within a few years of their consecration and several needed wholesale repairs. While mentioning the funds donated, many early records connected with temple establishments commonly use almost a proverbial phrase "for repairs and restorations" (*khaṇḍa-phuṭṭa-saṁskārārtha-*) indicating the prevailing situation.

There is some significant epigraphic evidence which sheds welcome light on the temple *śikhara* during early fifth cent. It comes exclusively from the Malwa region: (1) Gangadhar Ins., 423 A.D., verse 21, the temple resembled the high peak of the Kailāsa mountain (*Kailāsa-tuṅga-śikhara-pratima-*); (2) Tumain Ins., 435-36 A.D., a temple as lofty as a hill-peak (*giri-śṛṅga-tuṅga-*); (3) Mandasor Ins., 1st part, of 436 A.D., verse 30, the Sun temple having its *śikhara* as broad and towering as a hill-peak (*vistīrṇa-tuṅga-śikharaṁ śikhariprakāśam*). Mark that its initial construction got dilapidated within a few years and required wholesale repairs before 473 A.D.; verse 38 mentions the rennovated temple as "quite lofty and elegant, touching the sky with its fascinating *śikharas*" (*atyunnataṁ avadātaṁ nabhaḥspṛśanniva manoharaiśśikharaiḥ*). At this stage, the reference to *śikharas* in plural is important and presumably implies the presence of subsidiary replica-*śikharas* (*uraḥśṛṅga*) embellishing the body of the high superstructure as demarcating its several rising tiers (*bhūmis*). For a detailed discussion and additional epigraphic evidence, see my *Gupta Temple Architecture*.

two-tiered but flat-topped superstructure, about a metre high (the total height of the building being not more than 12 feet). Both in its several architectural and sculptural features, this temple is of a curious kind. Among Gupta stone temples, its superstructure is rather unique for its friezes of sculptured panels containing Gaṇas and Mithunas, which together with its rather simple doorway designs are in art style closely akin with the Deogarh sculpture.

Before we pass on to the Deogarh temple, it would be useful here to mention some of the Gupta buildings now in utter ruins but connected with datable records. One of the most disturbed early temple site is Gadhwa, near Allahabad, where at least four Gupta inscriptions mentioning donations to religious establishments during the time of emperors Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I were found engraved on the architectural remnants belonging to one or more temples, two of them bearing dates of G.E. 88=407-08 A.D. and G.E. 98 = 417-18 A.D. Apart from several fragmentary pieces surviving from the pillars, lintels and doorframes, we have unfortunately no further idea of the temple type originally erected at the place.

Cunningham discovered four pillars at Bilsad (Etah district, U.P.), two of them bearing copies of the same inscription of Kumāragupta with the date in G.E. 96=415 A.D. From the ruins it was concluded by him that it was "a simple square building with a portico of four pillars". As the inscription informs, a *pratoli* or gallery was added within the compound of the temple by a minister of the emperor. A fine doorframe and other fragments at Tumain (Guna district, M.P.) are presumably to be interpreted in the light of a record of 435-36 A.D. mentioning the erection of a temple there. Likewise, an inscription of 424 A.D. at Nagari near Chittor (Udaipur district, Rajasthan) evidences the erection of a Vishṇu temple of which some architectural members are found.

Similar has been the fate of Gupta religious buildings at Bhitari (Ghazipur district, U.P.), famous for its inscribed pillar of Skandagupta (455-67 A.D.), where several brick-built temple foundations were

exposed during the recent excavations. Smaller shrines, e.g. one on the river side, showed the square *triratha* plan of the sanctum presumably with a front *maṇḍapa*. But the square temple building just adjacent to the Skandagupta Pillar and certainly contemporaneous with it was an enormous one with its each side measuring about 54 ft.

The Vishṇu (Daśāvatāra) Temple at Deogarh is by far the most significant building. There is no dated record connected with it and its dating on stylistic grounds alone is a matter of controversy. By different authorities it has been assigned a date ranging from the second quarter of the fifth century to c. 600 A.D. Percy Brown assigned it to c. 500 A.D. while V.S. Agrawala proposed even an earlier dating in the light of his suggested identification of the Bhāgavata Govinda of a two-line pillar-inscription at Deogarh with the Gupta prince Govindagupta, the governor of Malwa during the reign of Kumāragupta I (c. 414-455 A.D.).

We have our own additional reasons to place this temple around 450 A.D. and in no case later than 473 A.D, i.e. the date of the Mandasor inscription mentioning the type of temple śikhara already much evolved constructionally as having subsidiary or replica śikharas.

Standing on a spacious terrace (55'x55'x6'), this building is otherwise of moderate size, being 18' 6'' square outside and 9' 9'' square inside, though originally rising over 40 feet high. We cannot be sure whether it had any front portico or not. It is now believed by most scholars, after M.S. Vats, that most probably there was high up on the walls a continuous projected canopy supported on strong cantilever beams shading its ornate doorframe and large panels in niches on the three walls. The most important part of the temple was indeed its śikhara, of which only the lower part has survived. Above the cornice level it gradually rose in receding stories or tiers (*bhūmis*) perhaps three, each marked by angle-*āmalakas* and the top by an *āmalaka-kalaśa* finial. This all was built of stone blocks with their outer faces veneered by chaitya-arch motifs. This moderate spire marks the emergence of a new epoch in temple architecture that paved the way for lofty Śikhara-temples which

must have begun to be erected at least a few years before the poets could imagine of "a temple resembling the high peak of the Kailāsa mountain" (Gangadhar ins., 423 A.D.), "a temple lofty like a hill peak" (Tumain ins., 435-36 A.D.), or "a temple śikhara towering as a hill peak" (Mandasor ins., 436 and 473 A.D.).

The Vishṇu Temple at Bhitargaon (Fatehpur district, U.P.) is the oldest and presently the only somewhat intact early Gupta brick temple, rising to a towering height of nearly 70 feet. Besides other features it shows the use of true voussoir arch. Standing on a high plinth (66 ft square), the main building shows a square plan but with *triratha* arrangements; it measures 47 ft x 36 ft (walls being 8 ft thick) having a sanctum (15 ft square inside) and an anteroom or porch (7 ft square inside and 14 ft square outside), which are connected by an 8 feet long passage (*antarāla*). Thus it shows a design more evolved than the early type consisting a sanctum and a porch. Although its dating is somewhat problematic, Percy Brown appears justified in placing its construction in the fifth century. We assign it to about 500 A.D. or better a decade earlier. Its pyradimal spire, remarkable for its straight contour, has an internally rising construction in the form of a triangular-topped chamber over the sanctum roof. The exterior of the walls rises up to the top in bold mouldings with decorative friezes and niched panels. All the surviving later Gupta temples, e.g. at Sirpur, Rajim and Kharod in Raipur district, M.P., show more or less a continuation of the same architectural planning and brickwork, as found at Bhitargaon.

Coming to the stone temples mention may be made of the Śiva Temple at Sakor (Damoh district) which, though represents largely the architectural features of the early temple genre, is to be dated after 500 A.D. Our chief interest lies in its having a walled *maṇḍapa* in place of a pillared porch. The design and sculpture of its doorframe closely resemble with those of the Bhumara sanctum to be noted below.

According to our estimate, a sub-type to be styled as Gupta-Vākāṭaka or Vākāṭaka is represented by the Bhumara and Nachna Kuthara

temples. In both the cases the architect appears to be concerned more with the provisions of a covered path of circumambulation than with the śikhara. On the basis of various reasons we think that both the buildings may be assigned to a date between c. 475 and 525 A.D.

It may be observed that in case of the early Gupta temples the worshipper was obliged to go round the building in veneration on the space provided by the spacious terrace (*jagatīpīṭha*) on which the temple stood. In the second stage, the circumambulatory passage was marked round the sanctum by a path on pillars or with a shading canopy. But now in the Pārvatī Temple at Nachna Kuthara a closed *pradakshiṇā* or cloister appears in a full-fledged form, perhaps due to the influence of the aisles in apsidal chaitya-halls as can be better seen at Aihole in the Lad Khan and the Durgā temples of the late sixth century under the Chālukya builidng activity.

The Nachna Kuthara temple shows in plan the sanctum (15' 6'' square outside, 8' square inside) centrally placed within a larger chamber (33' square outside and 26' square inside), both the chambers being dimly lighted by the arrangement of trellis windows pierced in the walls. There is no sign of a śikhara but a smaller cell over the sanctum is the curious feature that was probably intended to simply raise the height of the temple so as to make it visible from a distance. This may be compared with a similar provision of a smaller upper chamber seen in the Lad Khan, Kontgudi and Meguti temples at Aihole.

R.D. Banerji believed that the Śiva temple at Bhumara had a walled gallery round its flat-rooted sanctum. According to his observations, the entire building was 35 ft square with an additional large *maṇḍapa* in front. Most of the earlier scholars assigned the Bhumara temple a place along the early Gupta shrines. But, according to our estimate, its evolved architectural features, profusion of ornamentation and decandent workmanship of sculpture, all point to a date later than the Deogarh temple and most probably not before the beginning of the sixth century.

As regards the Gupta-Maitraka region, the old temple at Gop (Hallar

dt., Saurashtra) is undoubtedly significant. On its richly ornamented plinth, the main shrine (10 ft 9 in. square inside, with plain walls 2 ft thick), built of dry ashlar masonry, is enclosed within a cloister or covered *pradakshiṇāpatha* (35 ft square). Its tower, rising to about 23 ft, shows a curious pent-roof with two stepped out tiers, veneered by prominent chaitya-window niches on the four sides, and topped by a domical stone. Usually assigned to the sixth century, this fane presents the earliest extant example of a local temple style that evolved further in the area.

However, in the heart of the Gupta empire itself, an aberrant shrine type of the period seems to be represented by the terraced brick structures found at Ahichchhatrā, Rājagṛha and Pawaya. From the ruins these buildings appear to have derived their model from the stūpa shape and consisted of several solid terraces of diminishing sizes, raised one over the other. The Ahichchhatrā Śiva temple had a colossal Śivaliṅga installed on the top. The Pawaya structure was dedicated to Vishṇu. At Rājagṛha the Maṇiyar Math shrine, associated with the cult of Nāgas, was of circular shape, preserving an elaborate scheme of stucco figures (2 ft high) on its side face.

There is also evidence of an unusual temple group in brick, presumably Buddhisṭ, at Bodhgayā, Kasia and Nalanda. The Bodhgayā shrine in its Gupta original is believed to have had close resemblance with the Bhitargaon temple, at least in its constructional techniques, straight-edged tower having horizontal courses of ornamental niches, pointed vault over the sanctuaries, and the use of true arch. What remains now of the lofty temple at Nalanda is its massive basement, 63 ft square. It was square in plan and was built, as attested to by Hüen Tsang, on similar principles as the Bodhgayā temple. The Nirvāṇa temple at Kasia enshrined the extant stone Buddha in *mahāparinirvāṇa* pose, and in plan, as can be guessed from the ruins. measrued 48 ft x 32 ft, with its sanctum of 35 ft x 15 ft and walls 10 ft thick.

Buddhist Structural Buildings

Speaking of the Buddhist structural buildings raised during the period,

V.S. Agrawala observed : "A vigorous school of Gandhāra sculpture associated with monumental stūpas flourised in the earlier part of the Gupta period dating a little before and after 400 A.D. Stūpas, chapels and monasteries have been found at Jaulian, Charsadda and other ancient sites near Pushkalāvatī. At Mohrā Morādu an assembly hall, refectory, kitchen, store-room, bath room and laterine, associated with a religious establishment, indicate the luxurious mode of life of the monk residents. The Sārnāth excavations have unearthed the remnants of a Buddhist temple and a number of monasteries. The latter usually consisted of a number of rooms round a courtyard, sometimes having chapels of their own... The Mirpur Khas Stūpa of early Gupta period is an example of the combination of a Stūpa with three small chaples. There is a true brick arch in the central chapel and its carved bricks and terracotta Buddhas afford fine examples of Gupta plastic art. One of the two stūpas at Jarāsandha-kā-Baiṭhak in Rajgir and the Dhamekha Stūpa at Sarnath belong to the end of our period. The latter one is 128 feet in height and has four niches at the four cardinal points for Buddha images. The scroll work on the Stūpa has evoked just praise and the structure is also remarkable for the variety of geometric patterns with which part of its area has been covered."[1]

Cave Architecture

Excavated in a crescent-shaped rock-face overlooking the Waghora stream at Ajanta (Aurangabad dt.) twenty-four caves—out of a total of 30 (six caves belong to the Hīnayāna phase of art activity at this centre which ended by the 1st cent. B.C./A.D.) — represent the Mahāyāna phase of rock-cut (*layaṇa*) architecture as it flourished during the Gupta-Vākāṭaka revival from early fifth century onwards.[2]

The following general sequence for the Ajanta Mahāyāna vihāras and chaitya-halls is usually accepted :

1. *Gupta Art*, pp. 81-84.
2. Mitra, *Ajanta*, p. 8.

1. c. 450 A.D. : Vihāra Nos. 7, 6, 11;
2. c. 450-550 A.D. : Vihāra Nos. 15-18, 20; Chaityaghara 19 and 26;
3. c. 500-600 A.D. : Vihāra Nos. 1-5, 21-25, 27, Chaityaghara 29.

Chaitya-halls 19 and 26 follow the apsidal (*vṛttāyata*) plan of earlier chaityagharas with the difference that their interior was abundantly decorated with Buddha and Bodhisattva sculptures and paintings like all other Ajanta excavations of this period. No. 19, though small (46 ft x 24 ft), is one of the finest specimens of the cave architecture in its perfect planning and singularly well-proportioned design. Its magnificent facade consists of a pillared portico, ornate cornice and a huge chaitya-window flanked by portly Yaksha-figures and finely carved friezes of the kīrttimukha (chaitya-arch) motif. The interior has a central hall or nave (*madhya maṇḍapa*), separated from the side aisles (*vīthī*) by a row of 17 pillars, each having an ornamental capital with fine sculpture. The rock-hewn stūpa shows a high cylindrical drum and a globular dome with a *harmikā* and *tri-chhatrāvalī*, and has a Buddha figure standing under *a makara-toraṇa*. In size the Chaityaghara 26 is larger (67 ft x 36 ft, 31 ft high), though similar in its general arrangement and decoration, excepting that it has three doorways. It lacks something of the proportionate grace and rhythmic feeling so characteristic of Cave 19 in its components, and is rather an example given to over-ornamentation and excessive details.

Caves 16 and 17 are among the most beautiful vihāras at Ajanta. Not only for the painted decoration, they are important also from architectural standpoint. Vihāra 16 is a hall (65 ft square) with twenty pillars, and has on three inner sides a total of 14 recessed cells. A novel feature is the shrine, having two side aisles with carved pillars and a gigantic Buddha image seated in *pralambapāda* pose. Vihāra 17 follows almost a similar planning; however, its shrine has no side aisles but has an antechamber. The shrine doorway is carved beautifully, several compartments bearing floral designs and figures. Both these caves are remarkable for their pillar forms. Their ''Beauty is as remarkable as

their variety, no two pillars being exactly alike''

Sculpture

In the field of sculptor's art a technical perfection was, no doubt, achieved and zealously put into the service of image-making and monumental decorations. The elegance of form and purpose is the hall-mark of this art for about a period of more than two centuries of its own sustained flowering. A definitive transformation brought about in the existing ideals and aspirations of figure-sculpture truly influenced the entire formulation of subsequent Indian sculpture far and wide. Not only the political unification under an almost all-India imperial hegemony accorded a high time of prosperity and cultural afflatus, it was in so many ways a period of culmination of the Indian genius. The new wave of religious awakening now attained its fulfilment both in Mahāyāna Buddhism as well as the principal creeds of Purāṇic Brāhmaṇism based on the cult of *bhakti* which indeed formed the life-breath of the popular religious systems with a highly evolved image cult and its ritualism.

Much of the glory of Gupta sculpture depends in the main on the achievements and contributions of its two well-known great schools of Mathurā and Sarnath, which set the new stylistic model of expression that inundated within no time all other centres within the empire and outside it. A third potential centre can now be recognized as that of the Vidiśā (Vidisha) area of Central India. Besides, we have a number of other flourishing sites and centres that have yielded rich art remains with their own stylistic ramifications under the common ideals initially standardised by the above-mentioned main schools. We may be able to perhaps recognise a few more of them in future in a way better than what we know to-day, such as Kauśāmbī-Gadhwa, Patna-Rajgir-Bodhgaya, Mandasor, the Western Indian Caves, Devnimori-Shamalaji-Akota, and others.

However, the high quality and intellectual definition of Gupta style once accepted far and wide is found so dogmatically followed during the fifth and sixth centuries that this art is often viewed and praised in its

overall estimate without referring to its own specific development at various centres and their successive give-and-take in a chronological perspective. At the most, the early and late Gupta phases are recognised as distinct from each other but with a general feeling that there was a progressive deterioration after its early stylistic standard was achieved in the beginning. Much has been said by scholars about the greatness of Gupta art in choicest words; comparatively much less has been said about its origins and definition and about the successive phases of its history ranging over a period of not less than two hundred years. Answers to such problems within the framework of sustained Gupta endeavours of art may perhaps be derived from a reference to the dated material itself which fortunately is available in case of several leading centres. Special attempts in this regard have been made by several scholars, of which the most important contributions are those of Adris Banerji and John M. Rosenfield.[1]

It is generally agreed by most of the authorities that the artistic refinement and allied intellectual definitions characteristic of the Gupta style of sculpture emerged to prominence first in the Sarnath or Banaras School and then it came to be accepted within a short time as the standardised norm or conventional idiom of the widespread plastic pursuits in the whole of the Gupta empire and even outside its bounds. Thus, one of the significant questions which emerges is that how and when the Sarnath school brought about those innovations in the pre-existing style.

At Sarnath a phase of inactivity in the field of art preceded the Gupta period. The leading role in the manufacture of deity images during the Kushāṇa period was played by the Mathurā sculptors. The growth of sculpture and iconography in the whole of northern India was guided by

1. Banerji, 'Gupta Sculptures of Benares—A Study', *B.C. Law Volume*, Pt. 1, Calcutta, 1945; 'Influences of Benares Art', *Nehru Birthday Book*, New Delhi, 1949; Rosenfield, 'On the Dated Carvings of Sarnath', *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XXVI, 1, 1963. Also see Kramrisch, 'Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period'; Agrawala, V.S., 'Banaras School of Gupta Sculpture'; Agrawala, P.K., *Gupta-kālīna Kalā evaṁ Vāstu*.

the Mathurā masters, who supplied their products in abundance far and wide to even such centres as Ahichchhatrā, Śrāvastī, Kauśāmbī, Vārāṇasī, Bodhgayā, Rajgir, Sāñchī, etc. The finds of inscribed and dated Mathurā Bodhisåttvas of the early reign of Kanishka dedicated by the Mathuran monk Bala and his disciple at three major Buddhist centres including Sarnath, prove it. Several sculptures of Mathurā stone manufactured at Sarnath show that the local artists lost their initiative and patronage for some time. However, the model of the Kushāṇa Mathurā statue (Bala's dedication, Sarnath Museum No. B(a) 1) was copied faithfully by the Sarnath artist in local Chunar sandstone (B(a)2). Most remarkable is the rendering of the upper drapery by very shallow irregular lines over the left side. In another Sarnath statue (B(a) 3) manufactured locally even such lines are totally dispensed with on the front of the image. This distinctive attitude of the Sarnath artist, evinced even during the late Kushāṇa period itself, came to bring about far-reaching changes in the modelling of the image and its drapery, and set the model for the typical Sarnath Gupta drapery of film-like transparency. This new-style handling of figure-sculpture revealed through the drapery required the sculptor to rise to a height of technical capability, which found its perfect expression in the Gupta Sarnath style and an immediate recognition of the same as an all-India sculptural standard, within the empire and outside, transforming as it were the entire outlook of succeeding Asian sculpture.

When did the Sarnath Gupta sculptor came to his own and ushered in the new style as fully realised in plastic terms? Unfortunately, no dated Sarnath specimens are available at present for this formative Gupta phase. But some side-light on the problem is shed by a few sculptures from Bodhgayā, Kosam and Mathurā. A sandstone Sarnath image first published by Kramrisch[1] is at Bodhgayā which shows the standing Buddha clothed in an *ubhayāṁsika saṁghāṭī,* transparent and foldless, an unmistakable Sarnath Gupta innovation. The image has a long oval

1. *Indian Sculpture*, pl. 55.

halo with only scalloped border of the Kushāṇa type. This image may be taken to represent one of the Gupta Sarnath primitives. Another Buddha stele found at Kosam in 1956-57 digging[1] shows a curious amalgam of the Kushāṇa and Gupta features : (1) an unusual nimbus with scalloped border around the standing figure, and (2) the *ekāṁśika* drapery but of foldless diaphanous stuff recognisable only from its raised thick edges below and on the left side. This local Kosam product evinces a partial adaptation of the Sarnath drapery style by the Kosam artist early in the Gupta period, or may be recognised as a work of some Varanasi craftsman working at the Kosam centre. Allied to these rare pieces is perhaps one Sarnath Museum image (No. B(b) 1), which, according to Vogel, Sahni and Adris Banerji marks a transition from the Kushāṇa to the Gupta style, with an almost transluscent drapery but revealing the body in Kushāṇa Mathurā fashion.

The fact that Bodhgayā had imported a Mathurā Buddha, dated in the Year 64= 383-84 A.D., indicates that about this date the Mathurā school products were in demand even in the region further east of Varanasi. This image also testifies to the fact that newer grounds were being broken by the Mathurā artists too in their search for new spiritual ideals of religious statuary, and we see their attempts gaining credible success in conceiving, in the words of Kramrisch, ''the first image in India which its form signifies what its name implies''. This estimate is due largely to the inner vision conveyed plastically in the contemplative head of the image. It was the head treatment of the divine images in which the Mathurā masters took the lead in the early Gupta phase. This can be well demonstrated even by the nude deity-figure of the so-called Lakulīśa,[2] carved on the base of the Triśūla-topped Māheśvara pillar, inscribed in G.E. 61= 380 A.D. Without the inscription this relief also would have been ascribed to the late Kushāṇa period but for its charmingly meditative face.

1. *Indian Archaeology 1956-57—A Review*, p. 29, pl. XXXVII, A.
2. *Gupta Art*, Ill. 7.

Some welcome light is further shed on the question of the Gupta primitives by the dated Govindnagar Mathurā statue of the Year 115= 434-35 A.D.,[1] which is at present undoubtedly the earliest known dated Buddha image revealing the full-fledged Gupta type. This unequivocally proves that the Sarnath ideals of transluscent drapery and body treatment had by this time already gained ground even at Mathurā and were presumably accepted as formulating the highest Gupta ideals of statuary at several other centres. Alongwith it can safely be placed the famous Mathurā Buddhas in the National Museum (earlier M5 of the Indian Museum, Calcutta and A5 of the Mathura Museum),[2] which are almost similar to it in figural concept and plastic rendering. With this we are now able to fix roughly the date before which the ''Sarnath transformation'' in statuary ideals had taken place and spread over as the common norm to the great workshops of Mathurā and elsewhere. But the persisting individuality of each of the traditional schools as that of Mathurā must not misguide us in our estimate of these images, which represent in a true sense the new ideals of Gupta art-culture flourishing at several established centres in its intellectual dynamism and creative vitality.

Commenting on the above Mathurā statues, V.S. Agrawala observed, ''Two of the best examples of Gupta images are the standing Buddhas from Mathura. Their spiritual majesty creates a lasting impression and their delicate plastic feeling points to the perfection of figure sculpture in that age.'' The divine presence of the Enlightened One is truly imaged, perhaps for the first time, in these over life-size statues conforming fully to the pious aim of their donors, who wished, as it is worded in the pedestal-inscription of the image dedicated by monk Yaśadinna, to secure by this meritorious gift the supreme knowledge (*anuttara-jñāna*) for their parents, teachers and all sentient beings.

The Mathurā Buddha found at Mankuar near Allahabad and dated

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1. Williams, *op. cit.*, pl. 61.
2. *Gupta Art*, Ill. 18 and 17; Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, pls. 47-48.

in G.E. 129 = 448 A.D. is one such product in which the Mathurā artist seems to have treated the drapery almost in a non-existent manner. There are no folds nor any indication of its existence except for its portions shown over the legs and the seat. The same is also true with respect to the unique group of two meditative Buddha or monk figures carved on its pedestal. The reading of the above date is modified by D.C. Sircar to G.E. 109;[1] and if we accept his theory of the use of cipher in this inscription as correct, this would push back the acceptance of the above-mentioned new ideals at Mathurā by 5 or 6 years. Anyway, the new plastic achievements and their acceptance at various art centres in the empire may be referred to the first quarter of the fifth century A.D.

In the light of the Gadhwa inscriptions ranging from the time of emperors Chandragupta II to Skandagupta, bearing dates from Gupta Year 88 (= 407 A.D.) to year 148 (= 468 A.D.), and the allied sculptures and architectural carvings from the site, we can conclude with fair amount of certainty that the mature Gupta style had found its full expression in this area well before the middle of the fifth century. Several pilasters and a colossal lintel from Gadhwa are undoubtedly among the finest specimens of Gupta stylistic perfection belonging in our estimate to the early reign of Kumāragupta I, as attested to by two inscriptions of his time, one being dated in the Year 98 = 417-18 A.D.[2]

The above conclusions may be further substantiated by referring to the Bilsad inscription (Etah district, U.P.) of the Year 96 (= 415-16 A.D.) and connected pillar carvings, though much defaced, evincing another version of the same stylistic evolution.[3]

One of the finest Gupta carvings found at Gadhwa is to be seen on a door-jamb depicting a creeper with youthful damsels (*nārīlatā*) springing from its branches and entwining offshoots. In the words of

1. See *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, III, 1970, Cal. Uni., pp. 133-37.

2. See Agrawala, P.K., *Imperial Gupta Epigraphs*, Varanasi, 1983, pp. 20, 29-31, 37.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 26; Williams, *op. cit.*, pls. 81-84.

Cunningham, "The whole scroll is deeply sunk and very clearly and carefully carved; and... is one of the most pleasing and graceful specimens of Indian architectural ornaments." The colossal architrave (over 13 ft long; now in the Lucknow Museum) from Gadhwa shows in the centre a multi-armed Viśvarūpa Vishṇu, flanked on either side with the scenes of votaries moving in procession (*yātrā*) held in honour of the deity and a group of sages performing daily ablutions. As J.C. Harle writes, "The Gadhwa lintel is distinguished by the absence of purely decorative element (no jewellery even is worn) and by the skilful rhythmic placing and variety of attitudes of the procession, the work of a master sculptor 'unusually adept in representing three-dimensional poses, with an exceptionally slender canon of proportions'. ...It represents the zenith of Gupta narrative relief."[1]

On a smaller and somewhat later (c. 500 A.D.) lintel from Gadhwa there occurs an interesting narrative portrayal, which has been identified by V.S. Agrawala as a lively "scene from the Mahābhārata, viz., the fight between Bhīma and Jarāsandha, in the presence of Kṛishṇa and Arjuna."[2] The Gadhwa carvings being preserved in the archaeological collection at the site itself seem to be exceptionally rich in their legendary scenes, some of which still await proper attention and study.

In the direction of Bundelkhand an overflow of the same style is seen in the finds from Khoh, Uchahra and Nachna Kuthara, namely two Śivaliṅgas and two fragmentary Naṭarāja reliefs. One of the latter may be slightly later than the other but all these are to be dated not later than c. 450 A.D.

The Ekamukhī Liṅga from Khoh (now in the Allahabad Museum) was rightly praised by R.D. Banerji as "undoubtedly one of the best specimens of portraiture ever discovered amongst specimens of Gupta art." Almost a similar sculpture was recovered from the Uchahra (anc.

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1. Harle, *Art and Architecture*, p. 107.
2. *Gupta Art*, Ill. 65, p. 113.

Uchchakalpa) area. As V.S. Agrawala, who first published it,[1] says, "In the whole range of Indian sculpture this particular Śiva-liṅga is hard to be surpassed for the expression of spiritual contemplation or *samādhi* in its face. It is verily the flaming lamp of supreme wisdom, untrammelled by outer flickers—a *niṣkaṁpapradīpa* in the words of Kālidāsa. It is only in the Gupta age that we find such perfection gracing the endeavours of the artist." The Naṭarāja fragment from Nachna Kuthara, perhaps the earliest specimen of this eminent theme, is a little masterpiece (13 inch. high) of the fifth cent. style, visualising in plastic terms most charmingly and majestically the great dancing lord with a serene steadfast expression on the face and rhythmically moving multiple arms thrown around in creative gyrations. According to V.S. Agrawala, "One may at once concede that the artist's effort was crowned with complete success in the portrayal of the necessary element of the theme, viz. cosmic power lashing into motion but wedded to eternal poise and rest."

However, we have extensive remains of temple buildings and allied sculptures of the last quarter of the fifth and the early sixth century from this area that are to be reviewed in the light of the inscriptions of the Uchchakalpa Mahārāja Śarvanātha (c. 500-535 A.D.) and Parivrājaka Mahārāja Hāstin (c. 475—520 A.D.).

From this point, we wish to revert back to the art activity during the late fourth and the early fifth century at the centre of Vidiśā (Vidisha) and its surrounding areas. The Udaigiri group of caves fortunately bear three inscriptions of the reign of Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I. Recently a set of three seated Tīrthaṅkara images was found from village Durjanpur in the Vidisha district,[2] each bearing a dedicatory record of Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta, who presumably reigned for some time before his younger brother Chandragupta II killed him and usurped the throne in 376-77 A.D.. From art point of view, the images are no doubt

1. 'A Survey of Gupta Art and Sculptures from Nachna Kuthara and Khoh', *Lalit Kalā*, No. 9, 1961, pp. 22-26.

2. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, pl. 20; Williams, *op. cit.*, pls. 12-5.

in the well persisting pre-Gupta tradition and on comparison show a continuation of the same stylistic idiom as one finds expressed in the figures of an inscribed pedestal of Mathurā made during the time of Kushāṇa ruler Vāsishka found at Sāñchī. The only difference to be marked is in the decorative concept of the halo, which in the Vidisha Jinas shows the lotus-medallion carving of the late Kushāṇa type and is diametrically different from the ''moulded'' type floral designs of evolved or true Gupta expression. **A datable beginning of this ''moulded'' type of floral carving in Indian art can be pinpointed at Udaigiri, where one group of sculptural activity belongs to the time fo Chandragupta II's inscriptions, one being dated in the Year 82 = 401 A.D. for example, in the doorframe decoration of Cave 6 itself, of Cave 4, or in the upturning foliage of *pūrṇaghaṭa* capitals of the pillars in Cave 1.**

The whole series of early Gupta sculptures at Udaigiri shows a new creative vitality and inspired dynamism, which, however, are not presently in evidence at any other extant centre of this art phase which is securely datable with the help of inscriptions of c. 400 to 415 A.D. The imperial urge of exploring and achieving new horizons of glory in religious art and culture is reflected in its fully conscious plastic endeavour of the colossal wall-relief of Mahāvarāha and Cave 6 sculptures contiguous to it. These specimens indeed mark the turning point in stylistic innovations, and a new outlook of the transforming touch of refinement is fully evident in them. In the words of V.S. Agrawala, ''The sculpture (of Mahāvarāha) doubtless represents for the first time the vigour of which Gupta art was capable.'' The Udaigiri sculpture indeed manifests the stylistic transformation brought about within two decades after the date (380 A.D.) of the Mathurā Lakulīśa figure. If, on the one hand, the figures are endowed with the fleshy warmth of their rounded limbs and earth-bound weight, they appear, on the other hand, to breathe in a boundless atmosphere of higher intimations. But the sensitiveness of modelling and a discriminating plastic elegance that we see at Gadhwa are yet to be explored by the artist.

The second series of sculptural reliefs at Udaigiri belongs to the middle of the reign of Kumāragupta (c. 414-55 A.D.) as an inscription in Cave 20 of the Gupta Year 106 = 425-26 A.D. affirms. Unfortunately, the Jina reliefs on the wall of this cave are hopelessly damaged. But an evolved or mature Gupta style can be well made out in the less damaged doorframe and pillar carvings of Cave 19.

After this Udaigiri evidence there is a hiatus of some fifty or more years with regard to the epigraphically dated sculptural remains in the heart of Central India before the date of Budhagupta's stone-pillar (Gupta Year 165 = 484 A.D.) and the colossal animal Varāha of the Hūṇa ruler Toramāṇa's 1st regnal year (c. 495 or 500 A.D.) at Eran. Next in sequence some finds at and near Mandasor may be mentioned as presumably connected with the time of Yaśodharman, one of whose inscriptions is dated in Vikrama Year 589 = 532 A.D.

The two-faceted captial figure (about 5 feet high) of Budhagupta's monolith (43 feet high) makes an interesting study of Central Indian Gupta style (about 484 A.D.).[1] Against a slab topped by the wheel of Vishṇu, there stand two human figures, one facing to the west and the other to the east. As each of them holds a Nāga with both of his hands, they can be identified as personified Garuḍa-purushas. A stylistic assessment of these demi-gods and the lion figures on the abacus clearly indicate to the slackened aesthetic standards and a decadent local expression of tense and angular lineaments.

Next, at Eran, we have the gigantic thereomorphic form (over 11 ft high and 13 ft 10 inches long) of the Boar incarnation bearing Toramāṇa's inscription of 495 or 500 A.D. The monument is carved on an epic scale and its whole body is covered with numerous mythical figures of sages and divinities, males and females; a closer study of each of these figures can be most revealing for understanding the early iconography of Yajñavarāha described in the Purāṇas.[2] Here, a certain stiffness of poses

1. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, pl. 23.
2. Agrawala, V.S., *Solar Symbolism of the Boar*, Varanasi, 1963.

and technical schematisation in figural concept are the features which indicate lesser freedom for any inner feeling and inspiration of the artist. He appears to have followed mechanically the procedure of carving figures and motifs with no concentrated vision. The Earth-goddess figure of this Eran Boaṛ can be instructively compared with that of the Udaigiri Varāha for revealing the range of stylistice difference brought about within exactly a hundred years. If Udaigiri opened a new phase of rising graph in sculptural glory, the Eran statue marks its fading out diffusion.

Pawaya (anc. Padmāvatī), in the Gwalior district, seems to be another flourishing centre where art activity, with its terrraced temple of Vishṇu, started quite early in the Gupta period. Among such Pawaya sculptures, housed in the Gwalior Museum, an enormous lintel is a unique document of narrative reliefs of a high order, showing in the refined style of early fifth century, with all its elegance and charm, the legendary scenes of the Samudramanthana and Vāmana incarnation on its two sides. The well-preserved face depicts the story of Vāmana in three successive panels, the first showing dance and music performed in the *harem* of Bali; the second in two registers shows below, Bali's horse-sacrifice, his *sabhā*, and his *dāna* to Vāmana, and above, a two-storied palace-balcony occupied by lovely damsels, who are shown in diverse attractive attitudes in the act of looking at the miraculous figure of Trivikrama, portrayed in the next scene.[1] On the back, now much abraded, the Churning-of-Ocean by gods and demons, and other mythical figures, inlcuding a six-faced Skanda, are interesting. A bifaced capital-piece from Pawaya belonged presumably to the same shrine-complex and shows standing statues of Vishṇu and Chakrapurusha with joined backs.[2]

Before we pass on to the Mandasor sculptures of Yaśodharman's time, mention should be made of the Devagarh temple reliefs and their

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1. See Agrawala, P.K., 'A Literacy Motif in Gupta Sculpture', *JISOA*, Calcutta, XII-XIII, 1981-83, pp. 82 ff., pl. XX.

2. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, pl. 34; Agrawala, P.K., in *Bulletin of AIH and Arch.*, Sagar University, No. 2, 1968, pp. 67-69, figs. 1-2.

chronological position. It is not possible for us to place the best of the Devagarh sculptures after the dates of the Eran capital-figures and Boar colossus. In a most logical estimate of the prevailing Gupta style of Central India, the doorway carving and three large wall-reliefs of the Devagarh sanctum are to be placed after the middle of the fifth century but much before c. 500 A.D. The three magnificent *rathikā*-panels fixed on the exterior of the shrine show eminent Vaishṇava legends illustrating the Śeshaśāyī, Gajendra-moksha and the Penance of sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa at Badarikāśrama, — which, besides their iconographic details, are artistically of exceptional value for their exquisite and dignified carving. Its finely sculpted doorframe is also the inspired work of great artists showing an excellent scheme of such motifts on the side jambs as male and female attendants, *gaṇas*, amorous couples (*mithunas*), foliated scrolls, the Gaṅgā and Yamunā figures, etc. and in the lintel-inset (*lalāṭa-bimba*) a remarkable Vishṇu image seated on the couch of serpent Ananta. It is in fact at Devagarh that the full maturity of the Central Indian early Gupta style is best evidenced.

Some important material from Sāñchī may also be reviewed here against a similar chronological setting. The four seated Buddhas, which were originally installed against the four portals of the Great Sāñchī Stūpa, are presumably mentioned, as rightly guessed by Marshall, by the word '*Chaturbuddhāsana*' in a Sāñchī inscription of the Gupta Year 131 = 450-51 A.D. A sublime height of fine Gupta style is unquestionably maintained in these Sāñchī Buddhas[1] as we also find the same in a vigorous local version of the Devagarh wall-panels.

At this point, let us refer to the later growth of sculpture in the school of Sarnath itself. Within its area of direct influences it had presumably transformed the whole of Eastern Indian style already by the middle of the fifth century. But there is a paucity of dated material for the period in this region though sculptural remains at Rajgir, Bodhgayā, Rajaona, Sultanganj, etc. are known.

1. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, pls. 38-39.

However, the most important dated relic is the Jaina pillar at Kahaum in the Deoriya district bearing a standing Pārśvanātha image on its base and four nude Jinas on the four sides of its capital. The inscription is of G.E. 141 = 460 A.D. and thus securely dates these sculptures. The Pārśvanātha figure is fairly well-preserved and represents indeed the overflow of the Sarnath Gupta style in its all excellence. This has to be placed alongwith the group of three Sarnath Buddha statues dedicated in G.E. 154 and 157 (=473 and 476 A.D.) by one monk Abhayamitra.[1] There is no doubt that they are the works of the best masters of the school and represent the height of Indian sculptural endeavour. But we cannot also fail to see a canonical stylization or fixation having already set in with respect to the idealised type represented by these undoubted masterpieces. The same is also the case with well-known and widely illustrated Sarnath Buddha, seated in *padmāsana* and displaying *dharmachakra-pravartana* (Preaching the First Sermon) attitude by his hands (Sarnath Museum, No. B(b) 181). A.K. Coomaraswamy justifiably mentioned it as "the beautiful but less vigorous seated figure". However, it is certainly the best specimen of this stylistic phase, which had its own limitations and confining ideals of statuary. As S.K. Saraswati puts it, "In spite of the rigidly static pose, the entire physiognomy with its gliding planes, pure and harmonious limbs and soft and mellifluous contours is imbued with a notion of lithe movement that seems to throb within. Again, a subtle discipline permeates the enitre figure, physically as well as mentally. This is evident as much in the smooth and rhythmic treatment of the body as in the ethereal countenance suggestive of a mind absorbed and in serene enjoyment of spiritual bliss."

In comparison to the three dated images, we can attempt a stylistic assessment and proper placement of other Sarnath sculptures in a sequential framework. Anyway, a spell-bound conservatism as regards the quality of stylistic perfection and its suave expression had its own lasting character at Sarnath itself and in Eastern India as a whole under

1. *Ibid.*, pls. 67-69.

the direct influence of it.

However, amongst the dated Varanasi finds, a pillar from Rajghat, first published by Adris Banerji and later discussed by Rosenfield,[1] is of great interest as it bears a date of Gupta Year 159 = 478 A.D. and shows four small panels of Vaishṇava incarnations carved on its four sides. These small reliefs appear to lack much of the plastic charm and vitality as compared to the contemporary Buddha statues. But this may be partially due to the presently damaged surface of the carved stone; anyway, a marked slackening of the artistic concentration similar to Budhagupta's Eran capital figures is unmistakably there. There is another similar but larger pillar from Rajghat with its damaged inscription engraved in almost identical script. The four Vaishṇava figures of this cloumn show a superb and vigorous style true to the prestige of the Sarnath school and may be reckoned amongst the most inspired works of Gupta art in the late fifth century.

With respect to the Central Indian and Western Indian Gupta Schools, something of their own vigorous growth during the early sixth century can be studied at Mandasor and in the Ajanta Gupta-Vākāṭaka cave sculptures respectively. However, Ajanta sculptures and allied Western Indian cave material need an independent treatment and may not be touched here for obvious reasons. But the late Gupta-Mālava style seems to have gained a new leaven of vigour during the rule of Daśapura ruler Vishṇuvardhana-Yaśodharman (c. 525-535 A.D.), one of his eulogies bearing the date of V.S. 589 = 532 A.D. Besides, several significant architectural and figural carvings,[2] we can identify a colossal Śiva relief as a typical work of his time which is perhaps alluded to in one of his records itself by the most appropriate expression of enormous (*drāghishṭha*) Śūlapāṇi.

Bronzes

Compared to stone statuary Gupta metal sculpture is represented by a

1. See note on p.66.
2. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, pls. 100-01.

few specimens only. Some of them, evincing high technical achievement and artistic excellence in the medium, are indeed among the best products of the period. However, evolutionary stages of transformation of the art style from the Kushāṇa tradition to the refreshing Gupta ideals and plastic refinement can perhaps be best studied at present with the help of the numerous gold coins of early Gupta emperors. Here we find substantive evidence showing how formal emphasis on the physical volume and stolid dignity of stateliness, symbolised by the sharp-edged thick dresses, gave way to the charming bodily form imbued with inner movement of life defined in terms of shining plastic elegance. Several coin-types of Samudragupta already reveal the distinctive atmosphere and outlook of art and culture of his age, e.g. the Archer type, Battle-axe type, and the *Vīṇāvādaka* or ''Lute-player'' type.[1] Eloquent testimony to an inhering yet refreshing classical elegance, vitality and intellectual content of Gupta style in metal are many gold and silver coins of Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I and even of succeeding emperors.

Unfortunately, no separate centres of metal sculpture of the period can now be identified, but the material at hand can perhaps be studied in terms of regional origin and find-places of the specimens themselves, sometimes bearing close affinity in style with the stone finds. Archaeological excavations have not been prolific so far for metal art-objects. Most finds are chance recoveries. Their study is entirely based on style. Only a few bear inscriptions which help in ascertaining their date.

For Eastern India, we have some specimens in the Chausa Hoard, deposited in the Patna Museum,[2] which are assignable to the Gupta period. Two of them are seated Ādinātha images, showing the iconic

1. See Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi, 1957; Harle, *op. cit.*, pl. 2, for some specimens.

2. *Patna Museum Catalogue*, 1965, pp. 116-17, pls. XIX-XXI. U.P. Shah (see *Akota Bronzes*, Bombay, 1959) thinks that most bronzes of this hoard are not later than the Kushāṇa period. But some, as shown above, bearing Patna Mus. Nos. 6553, 6554, 6538, 6539, 6551, 6552 respectively, are certainly later.

trait of loose-hanging locks. Their nude body is plastically well-modelled and elegant while their meditative faces are charmingly conceived indicating evolved type of Gupta statuary. Two standing Jina bronzes may also belong to the early phase of Gupta style; both of them represent Ādinātha as shown by the hair-locks falling on his shoulders. Their *kāyotsarga* pose and stiff bodily form symbolises the canonical notion of steadfast penance; yet artistically the impress of Gupta plastic handling is borne out by the soft and sensitively done limbs and their mellifluous curves. The halo with lotus petals and branches is preserved in one specimen, which evinces traces of gilding with gold. However, two icons presumably showing Jina Chandraprabha, seated in *dhyānamudrā*, on a pedestalled throne with large *makara*-heads at the back and a crescent symbol on the top, are obviously the products of later Gupta style (post-600 A.D.).

The great standing Buddha from Sultanganj, Bhagalpur dt., now in the museum at Birmingham, is unique for its size (7 ft 6 inches) and displays a perfection of Indian lost-wax casting (*madhūchchhishṭa* or *sikthaka vidhāna*) and outstanding engineering skill of the Gupta artist in handling such a huge work in copper, allied achievements in large-scale metal forging being testified also by the inscribed Iron Pillar at Delhi. This well-preserved colossal statue is a masterpiece of late fifth century style in Eastern India, characterised by great emotional warmth in its plastic contents and expression. Sheathed in a transluscent robe, the attenuated figure of the Buddha is seen standing majestically in his compassionate presence with right hand in *abhaya mudrā* and the left as holding the *saṁghāṭī* ends, modelled as a thick heavy pattern falling on the side; over the body the mantle itself is marked only by dim waves of parallel wrinkles finely incised. The spiritual import and sublime statuary ideal of Sarnath inspiration are distinctly obvious in this perfect metal-sculpture of the Assuring Buddha. Extremely tender break in the shaft of the body appears to express the suffusing assurance of the Master to mankind, the gesture of *abhaya* being the canonical symbol of the same.

Otherwise he is the perfect image of ascetic tranquility both of mind and body, symbolised so suggestively by the reticent oval of the face, slightly over-proportionate legs and the vertical body. His smiling face, with meditative eyes, brilliant nose and lotus-lips, elongated ear-lobes hanging below the temples, and schematic hair—all are in well-defined Gupta conventions. Indeed, the Buddha statuary ideals attained by Gupta artists in the Sarnath and Sultanganj Buddhas came to persist and inspire generations of artists during subsequent periods.

A standing Buddha bronze, now in the Cleveland Museum, America,[1] represents Eastern style of c. 600 A.D. as it evolved on the lines of Sarnath and Sultanganj legacy. The image pedestal bears a four-line inscription with date, which has been variously read by scholars giving the year ranging from 233 to 373. According to D.C. Sircar, it is Gupta Year 313 = 632-33 A.D. It was dedicated at Laḍitagrāma, identified with Pātan in Nepal, and presumably produced either locally or at a nearby centre. The facial type is somewhat crude but the figure surprisingly approximates in style with the early Sarnath prototypes.

As an evidence of the sixth century style, a gold-plated bronze-image of Mañjuśrī from Mahasthan is a fine example.[2] It is, according to S.K. Saraswati, ''a rare counterpart of the Sarnath images, plastically as well as spiritually, but a subdued emotionalism, characteristic of the eastern trend, illuminates the rendering of the entire physiognomy, including particularly the face and the fingers.'' But a bronze Śiva (about 7 inches high) from Maniar Tat (Sundarbuns dt.),[3] now in the National

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1. Czuma, S., 'A Gupta Style Bronze Buddha', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Feb. 1970; von Schroeder Ulrich, *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, Hong Kong, 1981, pl. 74 E; *JAS*, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 123-24. However, in our opinion, the original pedestal represents a case of subsequent replacement in antiquity by a new cast made from it. So the entire palaeography of this specimen is intriguing and baffling. The base with feet was separately cast and joined by metallic pins. The image itself does not show any later working.

2. Saraswati, *Indian Sculpture*, pl. 108, p. 142.

3. *Ibid.*, pl. 127, p. 155.

Museum (formerly in Ajit Ghose Collection) evidences the conventionalised sculpture in the early part of the next century, denoting a significant statuary style evolved as per its own indigenous vitality and expression, which later fructified into the Pāla works.

With regards Northern India proper, a life-size Buddha head of mixed alloy comes from Azamgarh, U.P. (now in the Lucknow Museum). It still bears conspicuous traces of gold-plating and is of exceptionally fine workmanship of c. 400-25 A.D.[1] The face, engrossed in tranquil *samādhi*, with slanting eye-brows, introvert gaze and smiling lips, represents early Gupta sculpture at its best. It indeed excels in its plastic glory and spiritual contents and only a few stone masterpieces from Mathurā and Sarnath can rival this great metal-work of a true artist-genius of his times.

Two bronze Buddhas, one seated and the other standing, of late fifth century from Dhanesarkhera (Banda dt.) afford significant evidence of this art.[2] The seated image may be slightly earlier, its two-line inscription mentions the queen of Gupta prince Harirāja, who may be, according to Sircar, identical with the teacher Harigupta of Toramāṇa (the Hūṇa king died in c. 501-02 A.D.). The meditating Buddha, seated in *padmāsana*, displays *dharmachakrapravartana* attitude with both hands. The drapery is treated as a film-like transparent cover, marked only in its hem round the neck and waist. The standing statue, with right hand in *abhaya*, is somewhat heavy and conventional in its plastic rendering. The folds and edges of *saṁghāṭī* are sharply defined and convey its weight and thickness. Its large halo with rayed border was separately cast.

Mention here may also be made of a Kangra statuette in brass,[3]

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1. Compare it with the Mathurā stone Buddha head, pl. 19 of Agrawala's *Gupta Art*.

2. *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, pl. 43 D and 4 H; Rowland, *op. cit.*, pl. 86 B. For inscription cf. *Ep. Ind.*, XXXIII, p. 97.

3. Coomaraswamy, A.K., *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Dover reprint, 1965, pl. 163.

richly decorated and inlaid, showing preaching Buddha in *padmāsana*. It is quite similar in iconography to the Banda specimen, and has several ancillary figures and ornaments executed on its pedestal (inscribed with Buddhist creed). Showing combined indebtedness to both Gandhāra and Madhyadeśa styles, it demonstrates the emergence of a local school in metal-casting around 600 A.D. Similar observations may be made regarding a six-headed Kārttikeya, though of cruder workmanship, coming probably from the Chamba Hills, now in the National Museum (No. 66.48).[1]

Our scanty knowledge of Gupta metal craft has been greatly augmented by a group of seven standing Buddha icons recovered from Phophanar Kalan (25 km. from Burhanpur, Nimar dt., M.P.).[2] Four of them are even inscribed with dedicatory records of c. 5th-6th cent. A.D. In iconography all look alike and have little difference except for the varying size, the largest being 26 inches and the smallest only about 10 inches. They were cast hollow together with the pedestal and in a few cases eyes are inlaid with silver and show traces of colouring. Each was provided with a decorated parasol, five such being found separately.

However, several artistic types can be identified in the collection. Two show the *saṁghāṭī* of *ubhayāṁśika* fashion (covering both shoulders), in the treatment of which one figure (standing on a double-lotus pedestal) is akin to Mathurā images. The other bronze is nearer in its careful and expressive workmanship to the Sultanganj Buddha, except for its robe which is treated with massive folds. Its comparison with certain painted and carved Buddhas at Ajanta prove the high plastic quality of this little masterpiece. Five specimens display *ekāṁśika* (covering one shoulder) robe of the Buddha, who stands in rather rigid bodily posture. This stiffness renders the figures of the Compassionate Buddha less expressive. There is a striking affinity in their figural concept of style

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1. *VIJ*, Hoshiarpur, Vol. V, Pt. ii, 1967, p. 206, and plate.
2. Venkataramayya, M., 'Sixth Century Bronzes from Phophanar', *Lalit Kalā*, No. 12, 1962; von Schroeder, *op. cit.*, plṣ. 43 A, 44 D-F, H.

with Buddha bronzes found at Amarāvatī and Buddhapad in Andhra. During this period, Phophanar Kalan appears to have been a meeting point of stylistic influences both from northern and southern schools. The available finds, thus, should be justifiably regarded as representing a provincial style of Gupta-Vākāṭaka art that derived ideological inspirations from contemporary leading centres of Madhyadeśa and Veṅgī alike.

Perhaps, the best specimen of the Buddhapad bronzes is now in the Boston Museum.[1] It bears clear testimony to full absorption of Gupta statuary ideals in Andhra. Except for the face, showing *ūraṇā* mark and an impress of regional style, the figure imbibes true Gupta traditions of the north in its physiognomical type and transparent drapery treatment. Another Buddhapad Buddha exhibits similar distinctive features, while a third figure is quite different in plastic concepts, with the *varada* pose in right hand. All these three specimens are now in the Madras Museum, Chennai, as are the Amarāvatī bronze Buddhas. Two standing Buddha bronzes, excavated at Amarāvatī, represent an allied iconic type with right hand in the *varada* while one image shows the *abhaya* pose. All these specimens are of average workmanship; their significance lies in the fact that they offer rare evidence of metal casting in the Deccan during the fifth-sixth cent., a period of utter inactivity even for stone sculpture in the southern regions that, however, lay outside the Gupta empire proper.

Within the empire, illuminating evidence for its western part is afforded by a rich Jaina hoard of metal images discovered at Akota (near Baroda).[2] It is of Śvetāmbara affiliation and a few early Tīrthaṅkaras in the hoard are certainly of great artistic merit and accomplishment, representing a most vigorous Gupta School of bronze in Western India.

An outstanding specimen (ht 2 ft 7 inches) is of Ādinātha, standing

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1. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, pl. 159 (the find-place given by him now needs correction; instead of 'Burma', read Buddhapad).

2. Shah, U.P., *Akota Bronzes*, Bombay, 1959, pls. 8-11, 12b-13b.

in *kāyotsarga* pose, and wearing a *dhotī*, which is the earliest known presence of this iconic-sectarian trait. Cast hollow on a black core, the figure, although in damaged state, represents the high water-mark of bronze casting techniques. The eyes are inlaid with silver. All its pleasing features conform to the best Gupta ideals of youthful human body. It has been reasonably assigned to the early sixth cent. on stylistic grounds. Another beautiful gilt bronze of smaller size (ht 16 inches) is identified by U.P. Shah as the Jīvantasvāmī ('Mahāvīra still a prince'), who is dressed in princely apparel including a bejewelled crown and a variety of ornaments. This should also date close to the above masterpiece. The Akota collection offers a unique study revealing unbroken art tradition in its growth of bronze style through several centuries (6th—11th cent.). Thus a late sixth cent. Ādinātha, installed by monk Jinabhadra, is important to know the flourishing iconographic and art styles and their gradual transmutation. Two subordinate figures of Yaksha and Yakshī (Śāsana-devatās) accompanying this Jina image on either side are very charming little masterpieces of late Gupta art.

The four-headed Brahmā statue (ht over 3½ ft) from Mirpur Khas, Sind,[1] is a true memorial of Gupta metalsmith's artistic genius. It cannot be assigned to a date later than late fifth or early sixth cent. It is preserved in excellent condition and is a rare example of not only Brahmā but also of any Brāhmaṇical deity in Gupta bronzes. His four heads, facing cardinal points, are well-modelled and show identical details. The hair form a piled up *jaṭā-jūṭa* above the heads. Almost nude in upper portion, his charmingly modelled body is highly realistic of a Brāhmaṇa sage-priest with broad shoulders, thick-set bosom and a slightly bulging belly. He wears a sacred thread and has an antelope-skin partly covering his left shoulder. The fleshy contour of his lower body is revealed through an extremely diaphanous *dhotī*, which clings to the body as a foamy thin cover. The faces present a perfect Gupta model of idealised divine traits,

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1. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, pl. 168; Sivaramamurti, *Indian Bronzes*, Bombay, 1962, pl. 5.

including meditative eye-brows, lotus eyes, a pointed nose, smiling lotus lips, elongated ear-lobes and a rounded chin. Below is seen the "conch-shell" neck (*kambu-grīvā*) with threefold marks. His left hand perhaps carried a water-vessel, now missing, while the fingers of right hand display the *mudrā* of Veda-recital.

Perhaps belonging to the later plastic traditions of this region, there is a fragmentary Chakrapurusha bronze (9½ inches), of late sixth cent., now in the Ontario Museum, Toronto.[1] This shows a *gaṇa*-type portly dwarf of curious physiognomy. This belonged to a Vishṇu image, as can be ascertained from a contemporary sepcimen of a three-headed (with two extra faces of a lion and a boar), four-armed Vishṇu bronze of this school now in the Berlin Museum of Indian Art.[2] This moustached deity with muscular anatomy wears a scanty *dhotī* and shows strong Gandhāran art-conventions. He carries a lotus and a conch in his upper hands while the lower left rests on the head of a dwarf Chakrapurusha, similar to the Ontario example. There was perhaps another personified weapon (Gadā-devī) on his right, now missing. Between the feet a goddess (Pṛthivī) is seen emerging out of a lotus.

There are a few Buddhist bronzes belonging stylistically to the Gupta period found in the Gandhāra region. One Buddha statue, said to have come from Sahri-Bahlol,[3] shows Gandhāran archaism, combined with new Gupta artistic ideals of the early fifth century. Another important specimen is a bronze miniature stūpa, found near Peshawar and now in the Karachi National Museum of Pakistan;[4] besides its fine architectural and ornamental details cast in metal the dome of this votive model bears four seated Buddha images, placed within chaitya-arch niches on the four sides. The tiny figures, all alike, are finely made, with *ekāṁśika*

1. Lee, Sherman, in *Royal Ontario Museum Bulletin*, No. 24, Dec. 1956; von Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pl. 5 D.

2. *Ibid.*, pl. 5 E; Sivaramamurti, *op. cit.*, pl. 2.

3. Rowland, *op. cit.*, pl. 86 A; von Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pl. 4 C.

4. *Ibid.*, pl. 2 F; Ingholt, H., *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, Hamden Conn., 1957, pl. 496.

saṁghāṭī, prominent *ushṇīsha* on the head, and round charming faces characterised by meditative eyes, *ūrṇā* mark and dangling ear-lobes. Its date in the fifth-sixth cent. is suggested by these images which are imbued with essentially Gupta refinement and tender plastic feeling. Some other specimens of metal statuary have now been published[1] showing varying styles and art-conventions of divergent local trends in this vast region; however their chronology is mostly problematic and their stylistic assessment only arbitrary.

Terracottas

The Gupta art witnessed a widespread efflorescence in various mediums. The folk-level art of terracotta is also found gaining not only popular favour but also attaining new creative heights.[2] It not only shared in the high standards of Gupta aesthetic culture, it served in its turn, in its own humble way, to popularise it far and wide in all ranks of the society. Inspired clay modellers employed moulds to produce mechanically cast clay-figurines in great numbers, both for religious and secular needs of the people. No doubt, a close relationship amongst diverse art forms was brought about in this period as never before and after. As V.S. Agrawala says, ''The terracotta art of the Gupta period was a major factor in the development of the art-consciousness of the age, and claimed a place of honour alongside stone-sculpture, painting and architecture.'' The same authority further observes, ''Much of the terracotta work is imbibed with the spirit of true art prevailing at the time and it may rightly be claimed for the Gupta artist that he adorned whatever he touched. The vision of Bāṇabhaṭṭa that the four quarters in his age shone forth as if beautified by clay models (*pustamayya iva chakāsire kakubhaiḥ*) seems to have been based on the production of clay and stucco work on a mass scale.''

With the movement of building religious edifices and shrines in

1. See von Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pls. 3 A—E, G; 4 A—G, I; etc.
2. *Gupta Art,* pp. 45-57.

brickwork, new grounds were struck by Gupta coroplasts and modellers starting creative activity with enormous output and monumental planning. On the architecture of extant brick temples, beginning with the famous Bhitargaon one, some remarks have been made above. Beside it thousands of moulded bricks, baked plaques, panels and pilasters are found from various ruined temple sites of Northern India which represent charming figures, ornamental motifs and patterns of infinite variety and artistic excellence.

Significant material of religious terracotta plaques and figurines of early Gupta style (late 4th century) was collected at Rang Mahal, Bikaner.[1] They still present much of the ponderous feeling of Kushāṇa plastic tradition. But at the same time they significantly exhibit new outlook of suave elegance and discipline. The themes portrayed are the Kṛshṇa legends and Śaiva forms such as Kṛshṇa lifting the mount Govardhana, cowherd Kṛshṇa demanding the toll from a milkmaid, Śivaliṅga under a canopy, three-faced Śiva seated with Pārvatī on the Kailāsa, personified Wheel of Vishṇu, Ajaikapāda, Devī killing buffalo-demon, etc.

Specimens of moulded plaques and decorated bricks from Nagari, near Chittor, are remarkable for similar early workmanship. There is also a collection of fine terracottas from Pawaya in the Gwalior Museum, some of which afford a study of early Gupta style of similar bearing. Certain Mathurā terracottas are further noteworthy for their iconographic themes and charming expression, though of somewhat rough and artistically less inspired treatment, such as Vishṇu, Skanda riding a peacock, Devī seated on her lion mount, etc.[2]

A rich assemblage of moulded panels and reliefs comes from the fourth-fifth cent. Buddhist stūpas at Mirpur Khas (Sind) and Devanimori (Sabarkantha dt., Gujarat) that are visible fruits of contemporary vigorous

1. Agrawala, V.S., 'Religious Significance of the Gupta Terracottas from Rang Mahal', *Lalit Kalā*, No. 8, 1969.

2. Agrawala, V.S., 'Mathura Terracottas', *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society*, Vol. IX, 1936, figs. 53-59.

art activity in clay. Some Buddha and Bodhisattva plaques are of abiding beauty besides a group of ornamental pieces of bold and incisive designs.[1]

However, many sites in the central and eastern regions of the empire have yielded such ornamental bricks and moulded plaques, that are still *in situ* or once studded the Gupta monuments in their heyday at Bhita, Sahet-Mahet, Ahichchhatrā, Bhitargoan, Mahadeo Ghurhu (Basti dt.),[2] Rajgir, Nalanda, Aphsad, Mahasthan, Paharpur and other places in U.P., Bihar and Bengal during the most prolific epoch of 5th-6th and early seventh cent. A.D.

By far the richest collection of Ahichchhatrā terracottas,[3] now exhibited in the National Museum, New Delhi, is of special significance. They mainly represent Śaiva myths and allied subjects and originally formed part of a frieze running round the terraced Śiva temple at the site. They are works of great art and in some outstanding specimens the supreme level of artistic and spiritual experience of the age may be seen; for example in the heads of Śiva and Pārvatī, Bhairava image, Dakshiṇamūrti, and the life-size statues of Gaṅgā and Yamunā. They represent the high water-mark of the Gupta modeller's art during the late fifth century. Other noteworthy panels depict the scenes of Śiva's *gaṇas* destroying Daksha's sacrifices, Lakulīśa Bhikshāṭana, symbolic car of Sūrya, Kinnara couple, etc.

The large-scale brick-work, though much damaged now, of the Vishṇu temple at Bhitargaon still preserves much wealth of the terracotta art. Only a few pieces can be mentioned here as representative examples: the superb panel of Śeshaśāyī Vishṇu (Calcutta Museum), the lively scene of Gaṇeśa and his associates scrambling over a bowl of sweets, amorous couples, playful youths, etc.

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1. Moti Chandra, 'A Study in the Terracottas from Mirpur Khas', *Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin,* No. 7, 1959-62; Harle, *op. cit.*, pls. 116-26.

2. See Agrawala, P.K., *Mithuna*, Delhi, 1983, pl. 50.

3. Agrawala, V.S., 'Terracotta Figurines from Ahichchhatrā', *Ancient India*, No. 4, 1948.

On its outer face the circular brick-structure at Maniyar Math, Rajgir, had an elaborate scheme of stucco figures (about 2 ft high) framed in niches. They exhibited, as S.K. Saraswati remarks, "a fine, but emotional and sensuous rendering of the plastic form in soft and supple roundeness," and "formed the most felicitous specimens of the distinctive eastern trend." Out of this lot, now mostly destroyed, a Nāgī femal has been deservedly famous and often illustrated from an old photograph.[1] It is undoubtedly a work of great art, unrivalled in its plastic understanding and tender sensitivity of the female form. Evidencing the extension of this style further in the east, some remarkable plaques have come from Mahasthan; one medallion showing an amorous couple while another rectangular piece, a female beauty reclining on couch.

From various sites spread all over the empire a large number of Gupta clay-figurines, belonging to a distinctive sytle of smaller plaques, represent model types of fashionable men and women.[2] In fact, most of them are fragmentary heads retaining in some cases a part of the bust. It is less frequently that a complete specimen is found. They are small in size and were cast from single moulds as plaques flat on back, often bearing a hole on the top for suspension. The use of paints for beautifying their details of dress and ornaments is still noticed in some pieces, particularly from Rajghat. The extra clay between the legs and under the armpits was usually removed or holed through by the artist to give them free effect. The figurines betray an elegant simplicity in bodily form and decoration except for their gorgeous varieties of coiffure. V.S. Agrawala, making a pioneering study of such figurines from Rajghat and Ahichchhatrā, put forth an authoritative classification of fashionable styles and types of their hair-dressing in spiral curls, often identified with literary references offered by contemporary poets. The main

1. Saraswati, *op. cit.*, p. 142, pl. 105.

2. Agrawala, V.S., 'Rajghat Terracottas', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. IX, 1941; *Ancient India*, No. 4; *Gupta Art*, pp. 52 ff.; Agrawala, P.K., *Terracotta Human Figurines*, pp. 47-50, 109 ff., also p. 38.

coiffure varieties so described and named, are the following:

(i) Common *alakāvalī*, frizzled locks; (ii) *Chhatrākāra*, parasol-like hairdo, with or without a central parting; in some cases with a jewel; (iii) *Barhabhāra*, having side-curls spread out like a peacock's feathers; (iv) Tripartite or trefoil style, with a top-knot and two lateral masses; (v) Trefoil style with a central jewel; (vi) Bhramaraka, honey-comb fashion; (vii) Trimauli, with three prominent masses; (viii) Female type, covered by *oḍhanī*; and (ix) Male type, wearing plain cap or *ushṇīsha*; etc.

A curious type from Rajghat shows a combination of male and female hair-styles on right and left respectively, and has been identified as the Ardhanārīśvara fashion.

However, a life-size terracotta head of Ardhanārīśvara Śiva comes from Newal (Unnao dt.), now in the National Museum.[1] It is certainly a great masterpiece of Gupta religious art, exhibiting not only differant hair-styles and ornaments but also distinctive facial sides of Śiva and Devī fused in one unit, verily in realistion of the unique myth of divine syzygy that was conceived and venerated—in words of the poet-genius of the age (Kālidāsa), ''Ever knit like Word and Meaning'' (*vāgarthaviva saṁpṛktau*).

Painting

For the period of early Christian centuries, there has survived against climatic odds only little evidence of Indian painting. This is in the form of some wall-paintings. By far the richest material of this art as it flourished during the Gupta period is available at Ajanta and Bagh. Ajanta has been justly world-famous for preserving celebrated heritage of the Buddhist art and painting of two historical phases,[2] the earlier belonging to the 2nd-1st cent. B.C. (traced mainly in Caves 9 and 10 below the later

1. Agrawala, R.C., in *East and West*, Rome, Vol. XVII, 1967, pp. 277 ff., figs. 6-8.

2. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Vols. I-IV; Ghosh and Others, *Ajanta Murals*; Mitra, *Ajanta;* Sivaramamurti, *Indian Painting*, pp. 24-27, 33-45.

painted surface), and the later to Gupta-Vākāṭaka times (mostly extant in four caves, numbered 1, 2, 16 and 17). As early as 1879 about sixteen caves were found to have painted figures in considerable degrees. The smaller centre of Buddhist caves at Bagh (Dhar dt., M.P.) represents one culture-phase of the fifth cent. painted wall-decoration, now in much damaged state of preservation.

Obviously, there elapsed at Ajanta a gap of over 300 years between the two periods of art activity. According to Buddhist (Tibetan) historian Tārānātha, the credit for starting afresh the movement of art about the Gupta period goes to a master-artist Bimbisāra, ''whose works were specially wonderful and equal in merit to those of the gods''. This was styled the Madhyadeśa school.[1] Whatever may be the truth in Tārānātha's statement, the caves at Ajanta itself amply demonstrate the high technical and aesthetic level of religious art which the generations of artists of the Golden Age achieved and widely popularised.

The mural painting technique at Ajanta was followed with little change all over India. It is not fresco in the true Western sense of the term, but represents a tempera technique in which the painting was done on a dry wall-surface. The rough rocky surface of the caves was first covered with a coat of ferruginous earth, compounded with gravel, cowdung, paddy-husk, jute fibres or animal hair, etc. as a binding medium, to a thickness of an inch or slightly more. Over it a thin layer of rough mud-plaster was applied and this completely smoothened surface was finally given a fine coat of lime-wash. On this ground the actual painting was first done in bold outlines by master painters in cinnabar or ochre red (*dhāturāga*). Then the spaces were filled in locally with various colours and lastly the painting was finished as per the requisite shades, highlights and strengthening of the line-work. The entire painted surface was further given a lustrous finish through a burnishing process. The pallete of Ajanta artist consisted of simple mineral colours, namely red-ochre (*dhāturāga*), yellow-ochre (*haritāla*), vermilion (cinnabar,

1. *Gupta Art*, p. 92.

sindūra), terra verte (green), lime, kaolin, gypsum (*khaṭikā*), lamp-black (*kajjala*) and lapis lazuli (*rājavarta* blue). Excepting the last all basic colours were locally available.

It was the age when classical rules and canons of art were described in the technical and aesthetic manuals. For the painting we have the *Chitrasūtra* section of the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. This text, as remarked by V.S. Agrawala, "gives us the interrelation between painting, dancing and music, the common point of which is rhythm, and then detailed instructions as regards surface preparation in fresco painting, different kinds of colours and methods to employ them. Then follow sections on the technique of stippling and the rudiments of shading. Points of special aesthetic interests are also emphasised. Thus the beauty of line is said to be the special point of appreciation by the master artists; the connoisseurs take delight in stippling and the rudiments of shading; colouring is not of such great importance." However, the *Shaḍaṅga* theory of painting, as given in an older couplet cited by the *Kāmasūtra's* commentator Yaśodhara, was presumably formulated during the same age of artistic and aesthetic culmination. It refers to the main aspects of painting composition and its appreciation,[1] viz. (1) Theme (*Rūpabheda*) and allied (2) Conventions (*Pramāṇa*); (3) Emotional situation (*Bhāva*); (4) Rendering of beauty (*Lavaṇyayojanā*) and (5) Identity (*Sādṛśya*); and (6) Brush style and colour-work (*Varṇikābhaṅga*). That these texts have direct cultural bearing on the art of this period is aptly shown by several scholars. The extant remnants of Gupta wall paintings demonstrate the point well.

The principal character in most of the compositions at Ajanta forms the centre-point of scenes and is invariably given prominence in comparison to other subsidiary figures and details. The themes are large in extent though the figures are usually less than life-size. Themes are usually religious and mostly centre round the Buddha and his life, Bodhisattvas, the Jātakas and other edifying legends (*avadānas*). In

1. Agrawala, *Ṣaḍaṅga Canons of Painting*, Varanasi, 1981.

portraying them in fuller details the painter availed himself of unlimited occasion to handle every aspect and emotion of worldly life as well as of divinities and their mythical heavens. The cave interior was covered all round with plaster and carried painted decoration on the walls, pillars and ceilings. Even smaller spaces were filled with an immense variety of designs and motifs, woven with flowers, plants, birds, animals, humans and celestial beings. As shown by V.S. Agrawala,[1] it was a broad and comprehensive outlook on life that moved the artist to bring, as it were, the whole universe portrayed in painted walls—an imagery often worded in the writings of ancient theorists and poets by such phrases as *tribhuvana-sampuñjana, chitralekhadarśita-vichitrasakalatribhuvana,* etc. On this aspect of Ajanta murals Rothenstein remarks, "On the hundred walls and pillars of these rock-carved temples a vast drama moves before our eyes, a drama played by princes and sages and heroes, by men and women of every condition, against marvellously varied scenes, among forests and gardens, in courts and cities, on wide plains and in deep jungles; while above, the messengers of heaven move swiftly across the sky. From all these emanates a great joy in the surpassing radiance of the face of the world, in the physical nobility of men and women, in the strength and grace of animals and the loveliness and purity of birds and flowers; and woven into this fabric of material beauty we see ordered pattern of the spiritual realities of the universe."

There are a few inscriptions in the caves that securely date them to the Gupta-Vākāṭak period; the most important being in Cave 16. It refers its dedication in the time of Vākāṭaka king Harisheṇa, c. late fifth cent. From another record Cave 17 is also related to a feudatory of the same ruler. From several considerations, the extant paintings are generally referred to in the following order of dating: Nos. 16, 17, 1 and 2.

Some of the most famous illustrations at Ajanta are in Cave 1, depicting life-scenes of the Buddha, when he was prince Siddhārtha, his wife Yaśodharā, Assault and Temptation of Māra, Miracle of Śrāvastī,

1. *Gupta Art*, pp. 93, 97.

Conversion of Nanda, extensive Jātaka narratives such as the Śaṅkhapāla, Śibi, Mahājanaka, Chāmpeya and the great masterpieces showing large-sized Bodhisattvas, Padmapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi. Writing about Padmapāṇi, Benjamin Rowland observes, "The figure of the Great Bodhisattva is realised as the very embodiment of that compassion and tenderness that his mission of allaying the miseries of the world implies. The flawless opalescent smoothness of the skin, the eyes half-closed in reverie and the beautifully proportioned face, suggest a beauty beyond reality. This is a loveliness so refined and away from human level that it becomes a symbol of celestial beauty and purity."

Of a differing nature is the court-scene showing a king seated on his throne, surrounded by his courtiers and attendants, receiving an embassy of foreigners. Its description as a Persian (Sassanian) embassy at the court of Chālukya Pulakeśin II (610-42 A.D.) is highly uncertain. Some of the finest decorative panels occur on the painted ceiling of this Vihāra showing wonderful geometric and floral decorations vibrant with the life of creatures and figures filling their curves. For example, the panel with an elephant amidst lotus vegetation. A vigorous scene of the bull-fight occurs on a pillar-bracket and is deservedly famous for its superb drawing.

Cave 2 has preserved similar wealth of inspired works, showing Buddha's life-scenes, e.g. Māyādevī's Dream, Descent from the Tushita Heaven, Birth, etc. Of the Jātakas we have the tales of Haṁsa, Ruru, Vidhurapaṇḍita, and Kshāntivādin, and the story of Pūrṇāvadāna. Several compositions, marked by boldness of outline, in the narrative of the wise minister Vidhura are the princess Irandatī on a swing, game of dice, discourse in the Nāga palace, and the happy union. The Kshāntivādin Jātaka, though much damaged, is exceptional for its emotional setting. One scene of a kneeling woman begging mercy of an angry king brandishing his sword, is a masterpiece of an unknown artist. However, most of the ceiling decorations in this monastery are well-preserved and the one in the central shrine is indeed incredible for its

magnificent design-composition.

Cave 16 was one of the most beautiful vihāras for its architecture and sculpture as well as painting, though much of the painted work has disappeared by now. Of the less damaged paintings remarkable are the story of Nanda, Miracle of Śrāvastī, Life-scenes particularly Four Worldly Sorrows, Hasti-jātaka, Mahāummaga-jātaka, and Sutasoma-jātaka. The scene of a Dying Princess, usually identified as Nanda's lovely but unfortunate wife Sundarī, is well-known as a masterpiece portraying so graphically the pathos and distressed bodily condition of a *virahiṇī nāyikā* in her last state of lovesickness, having lost all hopes on seeing the crown of her husband brought by a servant.

However, the greatest quantity of murals is seen in Cave 17, where an eminent series of most versatile works of Ajanta masters can be studied in excellent preservation. Noteworthy are the detailed narrative illustrations from the Jātaka stories such as the Chhaddanta, Mahākapi, Haṁsa, Śaśa, Mahisha, Mātṛposhaka, Mṛga, Śyāma, Vessantara, Sutasoma, Śibi, etc., and the story of Siṁhala (from the *Divyāvadāna*). In all these elaborately pictured compositons, depicted in continuous narrative style, the painters have excelled in delineating various emotional settings with the use of expressive *mudrās* and dramatic gestures, and in their effortless mastery over drawing and colour work. Other attractive depictions include an unidentified court-scene, Indra and his flying and worshipful *apsarās*, scenes of drink, amorous couples, etc.

An overdoor panel shows seated figures of seven Mānushī Buddhas and the future Buddha Maitreya. The incidents from Buddha's life are also illustrated in gracefully enchanting compositions. For example, the subjugation of Nalagiri, the Descent at Sankisa, the Miracle of Śrāvastī, and the Return to Kapilavastu.

The last mentioned depiction (over 13 ft high) shows the mother and child meeting the Buddha. It is perhaps the most eminent life-scene at Ajanta. Here, the great monk on his return to Kapilavastu calls at the palace-gate in his begging round for the alms. Buddha's wife Yaśodharā

knows nothing what to do except putting forward their innocent son Rāhula, who in all perplexity of the occasion is demanding as it were his patrimony with extended hands. The scene meaningfully implies Buddha's admitting Rāhula to the Order by putting forward his begging-bowl to him. Above, the celestials are seen greeting the occasion with flowers. The tiny mother and child group, standing in a palace balcony, looks with their hands held out in hope to the towering figure of the compassionate lord who has come, in all his divine majesty and self-transcendence, nearer the earth. In its sublimity and intensely emotional content the painting is a rare piece of all human art. As remarked by Mukul Dey, who made a copy of the painting now displayed at the British Museum, "This magnificent, colossal original painting at Ajanta must be one of the most majestic and tender paintings in the world, showing intense love and spiritual devotion, and to many it may be a revelation of the heights which Indian art attained."[1]

Unique in conception and symbology is the huge decoration on the verandah wall of this cave. It shows the so-called "Wheel of Life" (*bhavachakra*), upheld by a pair of green hands, and consisting in its eight compartments diverse scenes depicting human beings undergoing the cycle of existence.

Fragmentary examples of Gupta paintings found at Bagh (Dhar dt., M.P.), should be dated, on stylistic grounds and epigraphical evidence now available,[2] slightly earlier than the main phase of the Ajanta murals. A copper plate of king Subandhu from Cave II at Bagh has now afforded a date for the caves in the fifth cent., where they are mentioned as already existing by the most befitting name Kalāyana-vihāra, "The House of

1. Dey, *My Pilgrimages to Ajanta and Bagh*, p. 102.

2. Mirashi, V.V., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. IV, pp. 19ff.; Agrawala, P.K., 'The Date of Bagh Caves and Their Paintings', *Bhāratī*, BHU, No. 9, Pt. II, 1965-66, pp. 9-16. Recently, some 27 copper plates, from Risvala, one km. from the Bagh Caves, have been recovered referring to the reigns of Mahārājas Bhuluṇḍa, Svāmidāsa, Rudradāsa, Bhaṭṭāraka and Nāgabhaṭa, with dates in years 47 to 134, presumably in the Gupta era. *Indian Archaeology 1982-83—A Review*, p. 120.

Art'', applicable either to Cave II or to the whole monastic set-up (cp. the local name Ranga Mahal for Cave IV). The technique and mode of painting are similar to those at Ajanta but the Bagh hill being of clayey sandstone the caves and their painted surface are in a hopeless ruination. Of the nine caves every inch of the interior was at one time covered with a thick coat of mud-plaster carrying most extensive work of painted decoration.

The bits of painting on the ceiling of Cave II, the largest vihāra with a stūpa at the rear end, show square compartment (of about one foot) filled with charming designs containing figures of elephant, bull, bird, fruits and flowers. Traces of elaborate painting also survive on walls, pillars and ceilings of Cave III, including some standing and seated Buddha figures and devotees. In Cave IV, another vihāra with the stūpa-chapel, some exquisite specimens of standing and seated Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are seen only in partial preservation, besides a great quantity of floral and geometric tracery covering the plastered rock-surface. Most attractive is the design of a meandering lotus-stalk, which as per the original scheme ran horizontally in its rhythmic expansion and continuity over the middle of all round wall of the hall. Unfortunately, this great ornamental *kalpalatā* is now seen only in small fragments. It is loaded with a wonderful world of vegetal growth, of birds and animals, singly or in pairs, and semi-divine figures of playing boys (*māṇavakas*), etc. Specially remarkable is a pair of running-away bulls.

In the continuous wall-space outside Caves IV and V, we have a painted fragment of about 45 ft (out of the original 220 ft of wall), which makes the Bagh paintings so well-known. The narrative scenes depicted here have not yet been identified; presumably they illustrate some *Jātaka* or *Avadāna*. The first panel shows a mourning princess, being consoled by her companion. In the second group, we see four princely or divine figures seated in conversation. The third scene has some monks flying or stationed in the air, with a row of female musicians below. Next, there are portrayed two rings of dancers and musicians, each with a male leader

encircled by female companions, some playing on instruments like the hand-drum, cymbals and flute while others keeping time with little wooden sticks. This seems to illustrate joyous troupes performing the folk dance-drama of the *Maṇḍala-rāsa* (cf. Gujarati *Ḍāṇḍiyā*) or Hallīsaka type. With their most colourful dresses and gorgeous coiffures, the dancing and singing figures present exceptionally charming study of gay life and its free dynamism. The last fragment shows the pompous scene of a royal procession with people moving on horse-back and on elephants. As C. Sivaramamurti observes, ''Composed of cavaliers and foot-soldiers with bows and arrows in their hands and, with the umbrella held over at least two stately figures, with princes on tuskers and highranking women on cow-elephants close to the royal gateway, probably in the vicinity of the palace, it suggests an important event in the royal household and the procession associated with that. It is one of the most magnificent representations of a royal procession in all its glory.''[1]

Rowland aptly remarks, ''Just as the sculpture of the Gupta period provided a canon for the entire Asian world, so the paintings of Ajanta, in style, in type, and in technique, exerted their influence on Buddhist art for centuries to come.'' The Gupta school of painting, as we see it at Ajanta and Bagh, attained high ideals of technical and artistic perfection in the surity and delicacy of lines, the proficient use of brilliant colours, the richness of expression infused with the vibrant feeling of life, and in the element of suggestivity—this art came to set up a tradition which spread far and wide within India (as evidenced by the painted murals traceable at Badami, Panamalai, Kāñchīpuram, Sittanavasal, Ellora, etc.) and even outside India exerted its direct or indirect influence on the art of Ceylon (Sigria, Hindagala), Afghanistan, Central Asia (Khotan, Kyzil, Dandan Uiliq, Turfan, etc.), China, Japan, and other countries of the Buddhist world.

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1. *Indian Painting*, p. 32.

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Chapter Five

Gupta Sculpture — Facets and Factors

Passing through a long spell of social, economic, religious, philosophical and political experience India acquired a distinct personality under the Gupta kings. To quote Anand K. Coomaraswamy, ''India herself is now for the first time spiritually and intellectually one, the normal rythm of life is established in and by the epics, and a fundamental unity of experience and character transcends all political, racial, linguistic and sectarian distinctions.''[1] In the sphere of art the Gupta period is distinguished by a new aesthetic vision achieved through a process of artistic evolution spanning several centuries. It gave rise to a style, often termed 'classical',[2] which has attracted attention ever since the art historians started appreciating Indian art.

A study of art involves an interminable dialogue between form and content, style and culture, the style being the *śābdī* and the culture its *ārthī* aspect. However, here we do not intend to give a comprehensive account of style and culture, various aspects of which have been dealt by a host of art historians of the old as well as new generations.[3] Here, an attempt has been made to understand the factors which contributed

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1. Coomaraswamy, Anand K., *Introduction to Indian Art*, p. 44.

2. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 71; Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 8; Agrawala, V.S., in *Lalit Kalā*, IX, p. 18; Saraswati, S.K., *A Survey of Indian Sculpture*, p. 66.

3. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, pp. 71-91; Agrawala, V.S., 'A Survey of Gupta Art and Some Sculptures from Nāchnā Kuṭhārā and Khoh', in *Lalit Kalā*, IX, April, 1961, pp. 16-26; Harle, *op.cit.*; Williams, Joanna Gottfried, *The Art of Gupta India*.

to the expansion and development of Gupta sculptural art and also to underline some of its facets so as to adequately appreciate the achievements of the Gupta artists.

It is a notable phenomenon in the art history of India that unlike the Kushāṇa period, in the Gupta age art did not flourish exclusively in a few centres but was dispersed over a vast area. Inspired by certain common ideals, an artistic unity became perceptible in the plastic representations throughout the empire and even beyond it.[1]

Religious Temper of the Gupta Age

The main reason for the expansion of art activities may be sought in the religious temper of the age.[2] An important event which had far-reaching influence on the development of art in particular and culture in general, was the shifting of the life-renunciating and pleasure-foresaking philosophy of the older Buddhism, Jainism and the institutionalised system of sacrifices from centre to periphery bringing gay and gladdening philosophy of devotion into cultural focus.[3] Several factors were operating strongly in favour of the new trend even before the Christian era. With the growth of urban life most of the Vedic symbolism, sacrifices and god-concepts and the abstract ideas of Nirvāṇa and Brahman were

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1. For the older generation of art critics, the term 'Gupta Art' stood for all art-creations produced anywhere in India when the Guptas were ruling. Later, however, the use of this term in a general way was questioned in view of regional variations in style (Misra, R.N., *Ancient Artists and Art-Activity*, p. 31). The issue is not relevant for our purpose. Therefore, without dwelling on this point at length, it may be pointed out that style, the product of local customs and traditions, should be distinguished from aesthetic diction which reflects the vision of an age through art and literature (Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, pp. 71-72). It was for the first time in Indian history that 'a fundamental unity of experience and character' was achieved in the Gupta period (*ibid.*; see also Williams, Joanna, *The Art of Gupta India*, p. 5).

2. ''Cults tend primarily to be expressive of the feelings and moods which people in any particular stream or at any given time of history happen to experience.'' Benson, P.H., *Religion in Contemporary Culture*, p. 614.

3. Coomaraswamy, *Introduction to Indian Art*, pp. 32-35.

becoming devoid of appeal. The masses could hardly evince interest in these abstruse and metaphysical concepts. The intermingling of diverse socio-cultural groups and the advent of foreigners who got admittance into the Indian social order, bringing about looseness in socio-religious structure, further accelerated the growth of the catholic creed of devotionalism.[1]

In the Gupta age, the condition was most conducive for the expansion of the devotional Āgamic culture which was confined to an area extending from North-Western India and Punjab to Gujarat till the 3rd century A.D. It extended to new regions in the Gupta age.[2] In contradistinction to the Vedic tradition which was restricted to the Brāhmaṇa class, the doors of the Āgamic culture were open for all and sundry who could seek salvation through personal devotion to a god of one's own choice conceived in visible form and worshipped by such simple modes as music, dance, offering of flowers, etc.[3] The construction of temples and installation of divine images formed the core of this culture. The spirit of the age may be gleaned through the dialogue between king Vajra and sage Mārkaṇḍeya who, while revealing the formula of happiness in this world and the next, declared, "To build a temple is meritorious; so is the making of an image of the deity. Meritorious is the worship of a divine image and so is its adoration."[4]

The Āgamic cult of Bhāgavatism found ardent followers in the Gupta family which made nolable contribution to the acceleration of art activity. As shown by S.R. Goyal, there is reason to believe that the Bhāgavata leaning of the early Gupta rulers was to an extent motivated by political

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1. "Social unrest must be regarded as the crucible out of which emerge new forms of organised activity — such as social movements, reforms, revolutions, religious cults, spiritual awakening and new moral orders." Blumer, H., 'Social Movements', in *Principles of Sociology*, ed. A.M. Lee, p. 173.

2. Pathak, V.S., *Smārta Religious Tradition*, p. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-19.

4. Shah, Priyabala, *The Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, II, p. 2.

considerations.[1] In the vast pantheon of Indian divinities, Vishṇu, the god *par excellence* of the Bhāgavatas, stands distinct with his royal personality capable of answering the imperial ambitions of the Gupta kings. Indeed, the kingly qualities of Vishṇu, recognised since the Vedic period[2] and elaborated in later works specially the *Mahābhārata*,[3] fully blossomed in the Bhāgavata concept of Chakravartin. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* asserts, "The Chakravartins are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. They have lived in the ages past and will come again in future."[4] In the same vein the *Vishṇu Purāṇa* says that the Chakravartins have the figure of Vishṇu's *chakra* in their hand due to which their influence remains ineffaciable in the ten quarters.[5] It seems that the early Gupta kings utilised the Bhāgavata concept of Chakravartin intimately associated with Vishṇu, which served as a powerful means of furthering their political interests.

The Bhāgavata affiliation of the Gupta monarch was responsible not only for the growing number of Vishṇu images from Mathurā[6] but also for the graceful depiction of the deity bearning the impression of a cultured and benevolent royalty in glaring contrast to the earlier icons generally characterised by ruggedness. It is interesting to note that the seated images of the deity, which are almost absent in the Kushāṇa art of

1. Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 1-35 ff.; cf. also, Chaturvedi, S.N., 'Early Gupta Emperors and Bhāgavatism', in *Indian Art and Culture*, ed. G.C. Pande, pp. 203-09.

2. *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, III. 1.10.3; *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā*, I.4 : *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, I.3.4.16; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, I.7.4.4.

3. *Mahābhārata*, Śāntiparva, 59.112-34.

4. *Vāyu Purāṇa*, XLVII.72.

5. *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, I.13.46.

6. Although no Vaishṇava monuments or image can be definitely associated with Gupta kings, a fragmentary inscription with Gupta geneology and fragments of a Brāhmaṇical temple from Katra Keshavadeva at Mathurā belong to the reign of Chandragupta II who probably built the temple of Vishṇu at the traditional site of Vāsudeva-Kṛshṇa's birth (Agrawala, V.S., 'Catalogue of the Mathura Museum', *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society*, XXIV-XXV, pp. 41-43).

Mathurā,[1] were fashioned in delightful postures by the Gupta artist.[2] Significantly, the *mahārājalīlā* posture, characteristic of royal grandeur, is shared by Chandragupta II[3] and the god Vishṇu.[4] The images of Vishṇu and his incarnations spread over a vast area extending from Bihar to Gujarat, co-eval with the extent of the Gupta empire, eloquently testify to the influence Bhāgavatism wielded under the Gupta rulers.

The popularity of the Āgamic cults among the royal families of the age is evident in the art remains found from Assam to Gujarat. As S.R. Goyal aptly points out, the Śaiva cult was patronised by the rivals of the Guptas—Nāgas, the Vākāṭakas, the Hūṇas and Yaśodharman of Mandasor, while their subordinate allies[5] such as the Varmans of Kāmarūpa, the Eran rulers having Vishṇu-ending names and the Varmans of Mandasor and many others, were dovotees of Vishṇu.[6] It may also be mentioned that the Buddhist leaning of the later Gupta emperors[7] played no mean part in the growth of the Sarnath school.[8]

Thus, the royalty, the aristocracy, the mercantile community and the resourceful prelates of the religious establishments professing different devotional creeds and sects, vied with each other in patronising the artist, which resulted in an unprecedented production of images and building of temples even in remote corners.

It is a notable phenomenon that art-activity under the Guptas, though dispersed over the entire area within the orbit of their influence,

1. The seated images of Vishṇu were fashioned for the first time in the transitional phase between the Kushāṇa and the Gupta periods (Mathura Museum, Nos. 39.2858 and 56.4200).

2. Mathura Museum, Nos. KT 191, 512 and 2419. A seated image of Vishṇu is carved above the doorway of the well-known Deogarh temple (Vatsa, M.S., 'The Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI*, 70, pl. IX a).

3. Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Couch type of coin, pl. IX, 1-5.

4. Mathura Museum, No. 512.

5. Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, p. 135.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 138, fn. 5.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 293-95. [Cf. *Supra* Ch. 1, Ed.].

8. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 21.

was inspired by certain common ideals resulting in an artistic unity perceptible in the plastic representations of the age.[1] This is a significant feature which needs to be examined at some length.

Impact of Politico-Administrative Structure on Gupta Art

If viewed in historical perspective, it would be found that the personality of the ruler and the politico-administrative structure always had a formative influence on the nature and development of art in India. The centralised imperial structure of the Mauryan administration[2] had, for example, not only established many centres of art but also created circumstances for the evolution of an awe-inspiring and conventionalised idiom of art without any regional variation either in the material or in the craftsmanship or even in the aesthetic diction. Like Mauryan administration, the Mauryan art was imperial and centralised. The Aśokan pillars are made of two types of stone, the spotted red and white sandstone found in the Mathurā region and the buff coloured hard sandstone quarried from Chunar.[3] Since the progressive development of the technical skill is witnessed in the capitals of the columns,[4] it seems reasonable to assume that all the pillars were made at one or two centres. Even if stone was transported to the site of erection, the craftsmen employed by the imperial agency should have been of necessity brought from a centre of art as it had been in the case of Aśokan inscriptions which even in the south were engraved by the scribe brought from the north by the Central Department of Writs (*Śāsanādhikaraṇa*).[5]

Art, patronised by Aśoka, indeed reflects the imperial glory. It symbolises the royal grandeur which aims at inspiring awe and fear of authority. It may appear strange that these artistic monuments which

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1. Joanna Williams also observes that 'unifying forces transcended regional ones in the core period, A.D. 370 to 550'. (*The Art of Gupta India*, p. 5).
2. Thapar, Romila, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, pp. 94-95.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
4. Ray, N.R., in *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 508.
5. Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 53-54.

were created to further the cause of a world-negating religion, subserve the interest of the secular majesty of a mundane ruler. It must, however, he borne in mind that imperialism always flaunts such symbols which are capable of producing a sense of awe for the authority. It was, therefore, not unnatural that the lofty and stately pillars, which are engraved with the noble principles of *Dhamma* or moral regulations were adorned with imposing animals, signifying the imperial dignity and authority.

The art patronised by the Kushāṇas also bears the stamp of their personality and the administrative machinery evolved by them. The magalomaniac urge of the barbarian rulers, who wanted to assert their divinity and who had established a centralised political structure for their far-flung empire, is fully reflected in the art objects produced under their direction. It not only displays their hybrid personality and rigid features but presents them as *devaputras*, 'the sons of god'. The heavily built images of the Kushāṇa kings creating a harsh frontal effect successfully arouse the feeling of awe for the authority, which is the *desideratum* of a centralised autocracy.

In the Kushāṇa empire, the art had two traditions — the indigenous, flourishing at Mathurā, and the alien, developing in the North-West—which differed from each other not only in aesthetic conception and its execution, but also in the material for fahsioning sculpture. Both these traditions, when pressed into service by the Kushāṇas, displayed uniformity only in objectives differing almost in all other respects.[1] There is difference in material used at the two places and in idiom due to different artistic traditions, but the attitude of the royal figures from the

1. ''When a demand for 'heroic' poetry arises among barbarian conquerors who have settled down to live off their conquests as a ruling caste, this demand can be satisfied in either one of the two alternative ways. Either the barbarians can produce minstrels of their own to celebrate their own deeds in their own language; or else they can call upon the subject population to supply them with the spiritual commodity of 'heroic' poetry as well as with the material commodities which they are accustomed to take as tribute.'' (Toyanbee, Arnold, *A Study of History*, 5, p. 605).

devakula at Māṭ near Mathurā and from the bagolaggo at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan does not differ at these two centres.[1] At both the centres, "The characteristic features of the style are rigidity, symmetry and frontality."[2] Rulers and court officials are often represented as standing facing front with the feet turned out.[3] The frontal posture may at places be attributed to the deficient skill of the sculptor. But when there is no such limitation, another explanation should be sought. Hauser explains: "All courtly and courteous art, intent on bestowing fame and praise, contains an element of the principle of frontality — of confronting the onlooker, the person who has commissioned the work, the master whom to serve and delight is the artist's duty."[4] Thus, the imperial art of the Kushāṇas was basically meant to inspire the feeling of reverence for the royal grandeur and the sense of fear for authority.

The personality of the Gupta rulers presents a picture in contrast to that of the Kushāṇa kings. It is true that Harisheṇa, the author of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, elevates his patron Samudragupta to divine status by using such epithets as *apratiratha* and *achintya*[5] which stand for Vishṇu,[6] the real temperament of the Gupta kings should be judged from the impression they wanted to create in the minds of their subjects. Their attitude is best depicted on their coins which were manufactured under their direct control. The coin devices of Samudragupta are mainly concerned with his prowess and martial achievements, the Lyrist type of course, being an exception presenting a finer taste of the emperor. But most of the devices on the coins of his illustrious successors portray the softer side of their personality by depicting them in pleasing postures

1. Keiffer, C.M., 'Kushān Art and the Historic Effigies of Mat (India) and Surkh Kotal (Afghanistan)', *Marg*, XV, 2, pp. 44-45.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 45. The aristocratic art of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt also shows the same feature (Hauser, Arnold, *Social History of Art*, 1, pp. 31-37).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
5. Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 258-59.
6. Sorenson, S., *An Index to the Names in the Mahābhārata*, pp. 746-47.

and relaxed attitudes. These types bear an unmistakable testimony to the fact that the imperial Guptas wished the people to admire their gentle, youthful and romantic image.[1] Obviously, the cultured personality of the Gupta monarchs produced an atmosphere conducive to creating a climate of joy helpful for the growth of artistic activity.

The administrative set-up of the Guptas also subscribed to the dispersal of common ideals over a vast area. The system was essentially feudal-federal in character — where the political power was distributed at different levels amongst a host of imperial officers, stationed at various administrative cèntres and the feudatories who ruled over their territories.[2] The court-culture of the imperial Guptas was a model for the *darbārs* of the provincial governors and feudal lords, and the emperor was a model of behaviour and style for the feudal lords, elite and the aristocracy of the urban centres. The artistic idiom appreciated by the emperor became the inspiring principle throughout the realm. Therefore, in spite of the regional growth of art, a uniform idiom appears to cut across the orchestration bringing about a kind of unity transcending geographical barriers. The sculpture might vary in technical perfection which, of course, depended upon the skill and experience of the local artists; it might also differ in the working material which was usually procured locally; but it is always imbibed with distinctive qualities often termed 'classical idiom' which permeates the art-creations whether manufactured in the realm of the Guptas or elsewhere.[3]

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1. See Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 251-52.

2. See Sharma, R.S., *Indian Feudalism*, Ch. I; Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 295-300.

3. In the opinion of Joanna Williams, the spread of Gupta style 'beyond the sway of Gupta administration' was largely due to better means of communications. She further says, ''Equally important are the claims, in the first place to dominion on the part of the Guptas themselves, and in the second place to rivaling the Guptas on the part of their successors. These claims must have encouraged the spread of a common artistic idiom across a broad area. It thus seems that the Guptas were responsible less for the form of Gupta art than for its extent.'' *The Art of Gupta India*, p. 4).

Primacy of Man in Gupta Art

The primacy of human figure in the Gupta art has also attracted the attention of scholars. It has been observed that Man came to occupy the pivotal position only gradually by pushing away the vegetal and animal world. N.R. Ray remarks that "Already at Mathurā and Amarāvatī we have seen figures of men and women away from and independent of the animal and vegetal world that used to surround them at Bharhut and Sāñchī. Now (in the Gupta age) all animal and vegetal patterns are pushed altogether out of the narrative on to the borders or to panels where they keep themselves confined to their exclusiveness."[1]

The change has been viewed in the light of a socio-economic process which had started taking shape several centuries earlier. Set against the agricultural background, the pre-Christian era art of Bharhut, Sāñchī, Bodhagayā, Mathurā and other places reveals itself through the variegated patterns in which men and women are inextricably intertwined with nature. Perhaps only a predominantly rural economy could have produced a culture which was characterised by glories of nature with all its unadulterated exuberance, spontaneity and simplicity. But from the beginning of the Christian era a change in the economic structure of society is clearly discernible. The age of the Kushāṇas saw a sudden spurt in the international trade which brought immense wealth to the business class, ushering in an era of prosperity, luxury and ease. As Ray observes, "slowly, but surely, the Deccan and also the North began to develop, along the river valleys, big emporiums of trade and commerce out of their old cities, and rural agricultural civilization began to be transformed into a mercantile one, at least in the large centres of life and activity."[2] Perhaps never before India had received a jolt of this immensity which shook the foundations of its rural simplicity, and implanted a new pattern of life on a large scale. Now onwards, the mercantile economy became the main plank of the country's economic structure and source of

1. Ray, N.R., in *The Classical Age*, pp. 516-17.
2. Ray, N.R., in *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 528.

affluence that was writ large on every facet of urban life.

The art of Mathurā and Amarāvatī in the early centuries of the Christian era is the mirror of the frolicksome, loose and pleasure-seeking town life. Even divine figures such as the yakshīs on the Mathurā railing pillars do not possess even a shade of divinity in them. On the other hand, with their buoyant figures, they trail the human mind down to the level of sensuous and carnal desires. These female figures with their sensual charm and erotic gestures emphasise only the warmth of flesh. Likewise, in the late art of Amarāvatī, the female figures have, as if, broken all the codes of conduct and come out with their animal passions which lie dormant in every human being. It may largely be attributed to the change in the taste and style of the people who mattered in the creation of art objects.[1] With the rise of mercantile economy, the affluent business community could dictate the artist, if not directly, through the extension of its patronage.[2]

The chief interest of this class lay in Man around whom all commercial activities move. Naturally, Man with his mundane interests aroused and attracted the greatest attention and became the most glorified and exalted subject of art.

There is no denying the fact that man attained the unsurpassed glory and importance in the Gupta age. Whether in art or in literature, everywhere human form reigns supreme. Economic factor, however, is insufficient to explain this phenomenon. In this connection, it may be pointed out that a new philosophy of life was gaining ground in the Gupta period which regards *karma* (action) to be the singular asset of man. It

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1. "In normal and long-enduring types of civilization... it has been man as patron rather than man as artist with whom decision has rested as to what shall be made." Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Theory of Beauty', in *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, p. 84.

2. "The art of Amarāvatī thus naturally reflects the disposition and attitude of a mercantile social economy which manifests preference for transient pleasures and temporary values, exuberant expression of joy and passion and courtly elegance and sophistication." *Op. cit.*

assures that man could achieve anything under the Sun through steadfast action. The belief and faith in man was so emphatically asserted that even gods were regarded inferior to him.[1] The position of man was elevated to such a height that even gods desired to be born as human beings on the earth.[2] Man was considered the fountainhead of noble qualities such as selfless love and sympathy for the afflicted. It was even declared that unlike ordinary actions, the action motivated by compassion could never be the cause of bondage.[3] Among innumerable creatures of the world, only man was capable of striving for interminable and unlimited love, sympathy and kindness, not restricted to the narrow limits of one's own community, province, country or even species; his heart ached indiscriminately for all beings in the throes of misery[4] and delighted in the happiness of friends and foes equally.[5] In such a view only the human form could be the supreme concern of artist or literature.

The Gupta art is dominated by human figures of divine or worshipful beings. The other figures play only a subsidiary role in this art. Therefore, an explanation must be sought in the religious beliefs of the various cults and sects flourishing in this period. If in Jainism a Tīrthaṁkara was conceived as *Mahāpurusha*, the Buddhists also projected Tathāgata as a *Mahāpurissa*, the Great Man endowed with sixty-four *lakshaṇas* (distinctive marks) and one hundred and twenty-eight *anuvyañjanas* (sub-marks). Thus, the human figure of the Master became all important — the chief subject of artistic expression.

The philosophy of the Āgamic cults conceived the Divine Being mainly in human form. For it, universe has been created by the union of Male and Female aspects of the Supreme Power.[6] It is necessary for happiness in this world and the next, as also for salvation, to secure

1. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, LVII.63.
2. *Ibid.*, LVII.62.
3. *Ibid.*, XCV.15.
4. *Matsya Purāṇa*, CCLXXVI.13-14.
5. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, CXVIII.12.
6. Pathak, V.S., *Smārta Religious Tradition*, pp. 13-14.

grace of the God through devotion.[1] The devotee was required to establish an intimate relationship with a personal deity, as intimate as between father and son, friend and friend, lover and beloved.[2] This was possible only if the redeemer had a human form. Thus, the Āgamic deities although divine in their powers, were human in their disposition.

The Gupta age completely arrested the sensual attraction of human body that had overtaken the urban community in the early centuries of the Christian era. The change is noticeable even in the figures of ordinary men and women.[3] The phenomenon may be understood in the light of the stability brought about in the age of the Guptas after centuries of political disquiet and social uncertainty. It is not difficult to imagine that the people at large must have rejoiced at the end of a long and tortuous span of uncertainty. A new norm of moral and social behaviour was readily accepted by the society.[4] The exhuberance of the early period was bridled in the Gupta age by an earnest desire for physical and intellectual discipline. The wild and luxuriant life is brought under control by a rigorous social scheme which aimed at the healthy and creative way of living. The unrestrained passions are now made to manifest themselves within a framework, sufficiently broad to make the life vitally interesting, and yet oriented towards a meaningful and transcendental purpose. The emphasis is now laid on balance in life which is the keynote of the ideal of the Purushārthas.

The balance is writ large everywhere in social code, literature and art. Though the final aim of human life is freedom from bondage, it is

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1. *Ibid*.
2. *Bhagavadgītā*, 11.44.
3. Ray, N.R., in *The Classical Age*, p. 517.
4. "People experience an intense emotion of joy when their disordered or deficient outlook on life is replaced by something noble in which they can believe and to which they can give allegiance readily. This emotion readily communicates itself from person to person when people have become sensitised by prolonged social unrest and are already seeking hopefully for something better for themselves." Benson, P.H., *Religion in Contemporary Culture*, p. 604.

laid down that the childhood should be spent in acquiring skills and learning and the youth in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures, to be abandoned with approaching age.[1] The female is no longer a mere mass of warm flesh to be dressed up for the satisfaction of male passions but is an active partner helping her mate in the realisation of secular as well as other-worldly ideals,[2] so much so that it was regarded foolish to think of obtaining salvation without fulfilling one's responsibilities as a householder.[3] The works of Kālidāsa are also characterised by the same spirit of balance. Although his description of amorous love and romance is sometime uninhibited, yet it never transcends the moral code. He regards the *gṛahasthāśrama* as the chief support of all the other *āśramas*.[4] Thus, under the control of social sanctions, the licentious extravagance of the wealthy urban community was channelised into a wholesome creativity, eventually leading to the development of finer and aesthestic temperament, responsible for the growth of art and literature.[5]

The Gupta art reflects the triumph of balance in human life and conduct over animal passions and waywardness. It is marked by a regulated elegance in not only the modelling of figures but also in the arrangement of various elements in the composition.[6] The figures, though

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1. *Raghuvaṁśa*, I.8.
2. *Kumārasambhava*, VI.13.
3. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, XLV.7.
4. *Raghuvaṁśa*, V.10.
5. "Such was the positive idealism of life in the Gupta age — beauty and normal perfection must go together; beauty and purity are like warp and woof of that richly emobroidered fabric termed "Life" : this is the meaning underlying the statement of Kālidāsa — *na rūpaṁ pāpa vṛttaye* (beauty — but not for sin). This is the inspiring message and essence of the aesthetic culture permeating the Golden Age." Agrawala, V.S., in *Lalit Kalā*, IX, pp. 16-17.
6. "There was a passionate desire to cultivate the beauty of the body in all its aspects, e.g., in the dressing of hair as seen in the charming styles of coiffure both in paintings and sculpture, in the elegant diaphanous drapery which aims at revealing the hidden beauty of the figure, the beautiful ornaments on the head, bust and limbs that pressed into service glittering gold and jewellery to enhance physical charm, but with a restraint that is the sign of high nobility." *Ibid.*, p. 16.

devoid of buoyant fleshy charm, are invariably full of a glow that emanates from a healthy body and mind. The tenderness and refinement of every composition mirrors the urbanity of the age.[1]

Aesthetic Philosophy of the Gupta Art

Gupta sculpture has drawn universal acclaim for its distinctive qualities.[2] Most of the art historians are charmed by 'serenity', 'calmness' and 'reposeful expression' of the Gupta images, which obviously relate mainly to the figure of the Buddha. Indeed, in their opinion, the Buddha images represent the supreme achievement of the Gupta artist. While recounting the distinguished features of the Gupta sculpture, Stella Kramrisch brings to fore the facial characteristics and contrasts them with the 'mask-like' uniformity observable at Bharhut, faces 'indicative of emotions that spring from the body' as found at Sāñchī and intense vitality expressed in the visage of the Amarāvatī figures.[3] She says : "In the early fourth century, the conquest of the mind is the theme of the face"[4] and in her

1. "When one considers the impressive volumes of the earlier art, in which the form is as it were pressed outward from within by an indomitable will, one thinks also of those numerous passages in literature where the hero is said to swell with anger, or of women's bodies that expand in adolescence or in passion, or of those pregnant trees whose pent-up flowering must be released by the touch of a lovely foot. With the passing of time all these energies were and must have been brought under greater control, softened and refined in expression, the will no longer asserting, but now rather realising itself in an active quiescence. We feel this already in the relative serenity of Gupta sculpture and the sophisticated poesy of the classical drama." Coomaraswamy, Anand K., 'Ābhāsa', *Transformation of Nature in Art*, pp. 150-51.

2. Coomaraswamy, Anand K., *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 71; Rowland, Benzamin, *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 130; Smith, V.A., *A History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon*, p. 170; Mukerjee, Radhakamal, *Flowering of Indian Art*, p. 95; Agrawala, V.S., *Gupta Art*, p. 31; *Lalit Kalā*, IX, pp. 16-26; Saraswati, S.K., *A Survey of Indian Sculpture*, pp. 120-31; Kramrisch, Stella, *Indian Sculpture*, pp. 58-63; Ray, Nihar Ranjan, *The Classical Age*, pp. 16-18; Williams, Joanna Gottfried, *The Art of Gupta India*, Introduction and Chapter 1; Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, Introduction.

3. Kramrisch, Stella, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 62.

4. *Op.cit.*

opinion, the model is set by 'the inner world conqueror', the Buddha.[1] For Benjamin Rowland 'a finished mastery in execution and a majestic serenity in expression' are the hall-marks of Gupta sculpture.[2] As representative examples, he selects mainly Buddha figures for an exhaustive treatment. He is also struck by the central face of a Vaikuṇṭha image from Mathurā, which "in its roundness and in the character of the individual features could scarcely be distinguished from a Buddha mask."[3] Even Nihar Ranjan Ray, one of the brilliant art critics, has the supple body and pensive countenance of Buddha in his mind when he appreciates the youthful human form in the Gupta art. He observes : "The face is lit up with this experience which is 'wisdom' itself, while the eyes with drooping eyelids, instead of looking out into the visible world, seem to look within where everything is at rest in contemplative concentration."[4] In fact, the Buddha images produced by the master sculptors of Mathurā and Sarnath loom large in most of the accounts of the Gupta art.

Changing Attitude towards Gupta Art

However, this estimate of the Gupta art emanates from a bias deeply rooted in the Western mind which evaluates art only through the yardstick of 'pure art' devised after the 'classical art standard' of the Graeco-Roman world. Indeed, the early European scholars were so thoroughly convinced of the absoluteness of this standard that they did not find any worth in Indian art. The typical attitude of European critics may be gleaned from a book on sculpture published in 1864 in which Indian sculpture received a summary disposal in the following words : "There is no temptation to dwell at length on the sculpture of Hindustan. It affords no assistance in tracing the history of art, and its debased quality deprives it of all interest as a phase of Fine Art, the point of view from which it

1. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
2. Rowland, Benjamin, *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 229.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
4. Ray, Nihar Ranjan, in *The Classical Age*, p. 517.

would have to be considered. It must be admitted, however, that the works existing have sufficient character to stamp their nationality, and although they possess no properties that can make them useful for the student, they offer very curious subjects of enquiry to the scholars and archaeologists. The sculptures found in various parts of India, at Ellora, Elephanta, and other places, are of a strictly symbolical or mythological character. They usually consist of monstrous combinations of human and brute forms, repulsive from their ugliness and outrageous defiance of rule and even possibility.''[1] Even those Europeans who were otherwise charmed by Indian culture, found Indians devoid of any sense of beauty. Max Müller, whose services for Vedic studies cannot be gainsaid, says : ''I had to tell him (Humboldt) that the idea of Beautiful in Nature did not exist in Indian mind. It is the same with their description of human beauty. They describe what they saw, they praise certain features.... but the Beautiful as such does not exist for them.''[2] Even an Englishman like Birdwood, after a lecture by Havell, could not refrain from blurting out, ''of 'fine art', the unfettered and impassioned realisation of the ideals kindled within us, by the things without us, I have upto the present, and through an experience of seventy-eight years, found no example in India.''[3]

A new era was heralded with the entry of E.B. Havell in the field of Indian art history. He correctly diagnosed the problem with the European scholars and wrote, ''Nothing is more firmly rooted in the mind of educated Englishman than the idea that civilization was a peculiar product of Greece; that the Greeks established aesthetic models for all times and all people, and that those who depart from them must be classed forthwith as decadent and degenerate.''[4] Havell was thus able to appreciate the essence and intent of Indian art, but even he could not completely free

1. Westmacott, *Handbook of Sculpture*, p. 51, quoted by Smith, V.A., in *A History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon*, pp. 2-3.

2. Quoted by Sastri, K.S. Ramaswami, in *Indian Aesthetics*, p. 46.

3. Quoted in *The Art Heritage of India*, ed. Pramod Chandra, p. vi.

4. Havell, E.B., *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, p. 33.

himself from the 'classical bias' which remained enbedded in some small cranny of his mind. In the Chapter entitled 'The Divine Ideal in Indian Art' of his *Indian Sculpture and Painting* Havell has discussed and illustrated only Buddha and Bodhisattva images completely obliterating the Vaishṇava-Śaiva art. Perhaps his notion that 'true Indian art is pure art, stripped of the superfluities and vulgarities'; is unconsciously guided by the Graeco-Roman standard.[1] Even V.S. Agrawala with his profound knowledge of Indian culture and inimitable insight finds the Buddha images as the best illustrations of the Gupta art. He says, "Serenity, repose, calmness, joy, unruffled fixity of mind, control over the objects of senses, perfect knowledge, compassion, discrimination and wisdom — these are some of the great principles of life and character which the divine images make manifest in the abiding charm of their visages which once seen can never be forgotten."[2]

This standard, in our opinion, is wholly inadequate to fathom the depths of Gupta sculpture. Indeed, art is the product of a cultural *milieu* existing in time and space.[3] The appreciation of art in terms of content, meaning and attributes should be done against the orientation and hierarchy of values and customs served by the artist. Art often objectifies values better than other forms of culture. In fact, it is more in the vestiges of art than in the garbled literary accounts, that we get a fair glimpse into the varied and vivacious life of the Gupta age and its people.

God Concepts of the Gupta Age

The Gupta art subserved mainly two widely opposed schools of

1. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
2. Agrawala, V.S., in *Lalit Kalā*, IX, p. 22.
3. "In order to understand works of art that we are asked to look at, it will not do to explain them in the terms of our own psychology and our aesthetics; to do so would be a pathetic fallacy. We shall not have understood those arts until we can think about them as their authors did." Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Why Exhibit Works of Art' in *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, p. 16. "Artistic creations are far more intimately linked with their own time than they are with the idea of art in general or the history of art as a unitary process." Hauser, Arnold, *Philosophy of Art History*, p. 36.

philosophy — the heterodox-ascetic, where a retreat from the world which is essentially and pre-eminently full of misery, is deemed essential, and the devotional, which maintains that the world is the creation of the cosmic sport of the Lord with his Śakti expressed in myriad ways and forms and as such nothing that forms part of the universe is to be deprecated. The ascetic philosophy completely ignored the play of man and nature on the vast stage of the universe. But the Āgamic schools with their wide vision scanned the sky from horizon to horizon. Moreover, in the extensive pantheon evolved in the course of its development, the Āgamic cults incorporated and adopted a host of divinities of plebian origin and assigned them respectable position. Even the classical form of supreme divinities, Vishṇu and Śiva, emerged as a result of the fusion of the Vedic and non-Vedic god-concepts. Thus, the Āgamic tradition included a wide variety of gods ranging from the primitive female divinities to such abstractly philosophical and urbane deities as Vishṇu-Nārāyaṇa.

By the Gupta period, the Brāhmaṇical pantheon had swelled to vast proportions. The Bhāgavata cult attained full maturity with various contributory strands completely coelescing to give rise to a vibrant movement. The theory of incarnation had fully developed to become the corner-stone of the cult and thus necessitating the production of new forms. A sub-sect, later designated as Kaśmīrāgama, centred round the worship of the four-faced Vaikuṇṭha, of which a multi-faced variant, Viśvarūpa, was also conceived. The Bhāgavata cosmogony was expressed through a beautiful composition known as *Śayanamūrti*.

The Śaiva system stands unique in the sense that if, on the one hand, it included extreme asceticism, on the other it incorporated orgiastic practices alongwith *liṅga* worship of the popular origin. The *liṅga* in the centre of the sanctum, sometime endowed with one or more faces of differing expressions, created a sober atmosphere but the deity in his human form with numerous postures and gestures, often portrayed with his consort, emitted a lively aroma in the temple. The versatile personality

of Śiva was responsible for the vast and varied range of his devotees who required icons in accordance with their predilections.

Kārttikeya, the Commander-in-Chief of the divine army, who is also worshipped under the name of Kumāra and Skanda, though recognised as a member of the Śaiva pantheon, had an inspiring message for Gupta emperors who sought his blessings for meeting the political exigencies. Chandragupta II named his son Kumāragupta after him. The importance of the deity increased in the reign of Kumāragupta I when the empire was threatened from external as well as internal dangers. He also named his son after the deity, and issued coins with his effigy. Peacock, the vehicle of Kārttikeya, formed the reverse device of his silver coins which were imitated by his son Skandagupta. The sudden emergence of his beautiful stone images in this period may be appreciated in the light of royal patronage conferred on the deity.

The Supreme Female Principle, which wielded great influence since the dawn of human civilization, was, by the Gupta period, inseparably combined with several Vedic female divinities such as Mahādevī, Seven Mothers, etc.[1] and consequently a syncretic image of the Great Śakti emerged in a most powerful form, of which the best exposition is found in the Devī Māhātmya section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.[2] There is reason to believe that apart from Durgā, Pārvatī, Mahishamardinī and Lakshmī, who had acquired higher status in the Brāhmaṇical pantheon, numerous anthropomorphic and aniconic forms of female divinities were worshipped in the peasant and tribal communities. However, the goddesses of popular religion were not exclusively confined to their rural abode.[3]

The reposeful and ascetic disposition of the Buddha and the Tīrthaṁkaras show a monotonous uniformity rendering the task of the

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1. Agrawala, V.S., *Devī Māhātmya*, Introduction, p. ii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
3. The Gangadhara inscription of 423 A.D. records the construction of a shrine full of Ḍākinīs around the Divine Mothers in the temple of Vishṇu (*Select Inscriptions*,

artist easier. But the depiction of Āgamic gods conceived in anthropomorphic forms required the artist to delve deep into human mind bringing out on the surface a multitude of sentiments— of eros, heroism, ferocity, anger and fear with their interminable permutations and combinations. The two trends created a complete gamut of emotions ranging from peaceful quietude to ferocious heroism which demanded consummate skill of the artist for rendering them through effective usual representations. It envisaged a whole universe with its multifaceted aspects, orchestrated with love and anger, spiritual inaction and worldly activities — high and low, divine and diabolical.

Theory of Rasa

The clue to the proper understanding of this ever-widening perspective in plastic diction of the Gupta period, lies in the development of the aesthetic taste as envisaged through the theory of *rasa*[1] — tasting of undifferentiated experience, giving rise to bliss (*ānanda*) — which may, however, be studied against the philosophical background of the devotional schools.

The word *rasa* basically stands for the different varieties of taste which are experienced by tongue.[2] It is also used in the sense of sap or juice or essence.[3] Later on, the word was used in aesthetics and metaphysics also and formed one of their fundamental concepts. The

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p. 385). It should not be interpreted, as D.C. Sircar has done, to show "the influence of the Tāntric cult of the mother-goddess on the Vaishṇavas." (*The Classical Age*, p. 426). On the contrary, it indicates the indiscriminate association of the goddesses with the various major divinities through the process of 'universalization' which according to Mekim Marriot, operates through the identification of a deity belonging to a minor tradition with the divinity of a major tradition. See, Redfield, Robert, *Peasant Society and Culture*, p. 54.

1. Shah, Priyabala, *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I. 30.

2. Śaṅkarāchārya's Commentary on the *Taittirīya Upanishad*, quoted by Ramaswami Shastri in *Indian Aesthetics*, p. 191.

3. In the *Gītā* (VII.8) the word *rasa* is used for the source which imparts tastefulness. The word *Rasa Śāstra*, the science of alchemy and chemistry, is derived from the same meaning.

Upanishads identified *rasa* with Brahman,[1] whereas authorities on aesthetics regarded it as the simulator of the state full of bliss.[2] According to the traditional view, the application of *rasa* on poetry was successfully effected for the first time by Vālmīki in his *Rāmāyaṇa*, when his poignant feeling of pathos at the loud lamentations of a bird whose consort was killed, assumed spontaneously the form of poetry.[3] The sage Bharata is traditionally credited with the detailed exposition of *rasa* in the context of the dramatic technique and theory. Although the first work now available on the *rasa* theory of sculpture is the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*,[4] there is hardly any doubt that from early times the Naiyāyikas were explaining *rasa* in the context of *chitra* (sculpture). Tell-tale evidence for this comes from the 'axiom of sculptured horse' (*Chitraturaṅga-nyāya*) quoted for explaining Śaṅkuka's view of *rasa*.[5] When elucidated, the axiom means that the semblance of resemblance in the sculptured horse with its four-footed counterpart in actual life suddenly heightens the consciousness (*chittachamatkāra*) which results in the upsurge of bliss (*ānanda*). The Naiyāyikas were Pāśupatas in contradistinction to the Vaiśeshikas who were Śaiva-siddhāntins. Therefore, we may venture to enlarge the elucidation given above by stating that through creative activity in the fashioning of sculpture, the soul in bondage (*paśu*), partly and in a limited sense, expresses the creative energy (*kriyā-śakti*) of the Lord (Paśupati) and thus obtains, partially and temporarily, the status of the creator.

The *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* contains a systematic and detailed exposition of the *chitra-rasa* which comprises as a basis the widest possible spectrum of emotions, classified under nine categories of love, laughter, sorrow, anger, high-spiritedness, fear, disgust, astonishment

1. *Taittirīya Upanishad*, II.7.
2. *Kāvya Prakāśa*, I.2.
3. *Raghuvaṁśa*, XIV.70.
4. Shah, Priyabala, *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I. 43.1.
5. *Kāvya Prakāśa*, IV, p. 68.

and passivity.[1] When accompanied by kindred sentiments, these emotions mature into *rasa*.[2]

Thus, it will be seen that *rasa* is not an objective quality in an artistic composition, but a mental process independent of the texture of the subject-matter. In other words, *rasa* indicates the detached and yet joyful mental state which arises from the perfect and undifferentiated self-identification with the theme (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*).[3] Of course, a work of art may and often does afford us at the same time pleasure in a senuous or moral way, but this sort of pleasure is derived directly from its material qualities, such as tone or textures, assonance etc., or the ethical paculiarity of its theme, and not from its aesthetic qualities : the aesthetic experience is independent of this, and may even, as Dhanañjaya says, ''be derived in spite of sensuous or moral displeasure.''[4]

The new aesthetics, in concert with the philosophy of devotional schools, revolutionised the plastic art of the Gupta age. Unlike the world-negating view of the heterodox philosophy, for the devotional creeds every spark of energy in the body, mind and nature emanated from the bonfire of bliss. They conceived the world as the divine sport of the eternal parents — Lakshmī and Vishṇu or Śiva and Śakti. It would have been sacrilegious for the devotional artist to shut his eyes from the glorious manifestation of the Lord. The whole world with myriads of sentiments and millions of objects burst upon the devotional artist with a tingling joy

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1. Shah, Priyabala, *op.cit.*

2. According to Bharata (*Nāṭya Śāstra*, VI, p. 272) the prominent emotion is called *sthāyībhāva*. It develops into *rasa* when it is intensified by principal stimulating causes (*vibhāva*) and expressed through external monifestation (*aṇubhāva*), prominent physical effects (*sāttvika bhāva*) and variable collateral feelings (*vyabbichārī bhāva*).

3. ''Rasa is tasted — beauty is felt — only by empathy, Einfühlung (*sādhāraṇa*); that is to say by entering into, feeling the permanent motif; but it is not the same as permanent motif itself, for, from this point of view, it matters not with which of the permanent motifs we have to do.'' Coomaraswamy, A.K., in *The Dance of Śiva*, p. 54.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

of aesthetic ecstasy.[1] This wider vision created deeper insight into the working of the emotions. Different combination of emotions, where a perfect concord at once deepens and broadens the aesthetic effects, or various variegated patterns of emotions (*bhāva-śabalatā*) of similar but not identical category which add to the richness in the aesthetic appeal, were consciously and deftly worked out in stone. The Ādivarāha of the Udayagiri cave is a fair example of the variegated scheme of emotions converging on the central sentiment, whereas the Ekamukha Śivaliṅga of Khoh or the Sarnath image of the Buddha in the posture of moving the Wheel of Law may illustrate the concordant scheme of emotions. The heaving of Varāha from the depths of the ocean is one of the finest plastic expressions of 'the high-spiritedness' (*utsāha*) which is the basic emotion for the heroic sentiment (*vīra-rasa*). With right foot solidly planted on the ground, left foot bent at the knee and placed on a platform, and right hand on the waist and left on the raised thigh, the solid mass in the magnified image of Varāha melts into a dynamic expression of undaunted courage and intimidating attitude towards the miscreant devil. The torso of Varāha is thus a limpid and lively expression of heroism with the attendant emotion of 'high-spiritedness' and challenging gestures (*anubhāva*). But, the small and gradually decreasing snout of the Boar moulded with soft plasticity, presents a contrast to the vigorous delineation of the torso. The flower-like, delicate and tenderly small figure of Pṛthivī, lightly hanging from the snout, is calculated to create the sentiment of eros, whose emotive substratum is the love (*rati*) of Varāha towards her. Beside these central emotions of 'high-spiritedness' and 'love', the astonishment displayed by the King of Serpents and the

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1. "A purely abstract philosophy or a psychology like that of Early Buddhism does not demand aesthetic expression; it was the spirit of worship which built upon the foundations of Buddhist and Vedāntic thought the mansions of Indian religion, which shelter all those whom purely intellectual formulae could not satisfy — the children of this world who will not hurry along the path of Release, and the mystics who find a foretaste of freedom in the love of every cloud in the sky and flower at their feet." Coomaraswamy, 'Hindu View of Art : Historical', *ibid.*, p. 29.

respectful adoration of the gods and sages towards the Lord are the minor and helpful emotions, strengthening the nuclear emotion and completing the scheme. To express in the traditional phraseology of *Sāhitya-śāstra*, eros is the central sentiment (*sthāyībhāva*), whereas heroism is the subsidiary (*sañchārī*) sentiment. Astonishment displayed by Nagaraja helps to mature the heroic sentiment while respectful adoration of the gods strengthens the central sentiment of eros. Unlike the complex and complicated composition of the Varāha of Udayagiri, the Sarnath image of the Buddha shows the unitary scheme of the sentiments of peace (*santa rasa*) based on the basic emotion of detachment from life and mundane activities.

The articulation of a wide and varied range of emotions through sculpture was the culmination of vast experience and painstaking experimentation which gave rise to the codification of an elaborate canon. In the process it was realised that the constitution of *chitra* was based on the archetype of dance and drama. Mārkaṇḍeya declares : ''It is very difficult to know the canon of *chitra* without the knowledge of dance and drama.''[1] He further adds : ''As in dance, so also in sculpture all the three worlds are given representation.''[2] The Paurāṇika wisdom was actualized for the first time in the Gupta art. The influence of dance and drama broke the thraldom of stone which waxes at the hands of the artist to make sculpture move with rythm and to import it with a kind of dynamism, like that of an actor in the histrionic art or a dancer rendering a musical composition in the language of action. Thus the mass of stone or a lump of clay was transformed into an amazing diversity of lines radiating in different directions accentuating the desired purport of action or poise. The treatment pre-supposes an extensive and systematic formulation of the types of men, measurement and proportions of the different parts of the body, physical features of men, gods and demons, the principle of dimunition and augmentation (*kshaya* and *vṛddhi*), the

1. Shah, Priyabala, *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I, 2.4-5.
2. *Ibid.*, I, 35.5.

delineation of the various objects and the persons of different castes and status. The *Vishṇudharmottara* describes five kinds of male and female bodies[1] with an account of their measurements and other features.[2] It further gives a list of the six styles of hair-do.[3] The principle of dimunition and augmentation, that is fore-shortening, was fully developed to depict nine varied postures. These postures are inter-punctuated with a number of gestures, viz. the movements of eye, nose, cheek and lip and *hastyābhinaya* — acting by means of hands.[4] Thus, the hand-poses and spontaneous bodily reactions have made the human figure in the Gupta art tingle with action emphasising the desired emotions.

The Gupta art for the first time aimed at creating undifferentiated pleasure independent of the theme and gave plastic expression to the widest possible spectrum of emotions. The new aesthetic philosophy was responsible for formulating a standard which inspired generations of artists. There is hardly any part of the country which remained untouched by the new ideal. It is indeed this attribute which has accorded a lasting place to the art of the Gupta period in the history of Indian art.

1. *Ibid.*, I, 35.8; 37.1.
2. *Ibid.*, I, 35-37.
3. *Ibid.*, I, 37-38.
4. *Ibid.*, I, 35-37.

Chapter Six

Buddhist Art of the Gupta Age

By the time the Gupta Age dawned (c. 320 A.D.) Buddhism was already over seven hundred years old. The seamless garment of the unity of its doctrines and monastic life had been sundered four centuries before Samudra Gupta began his brilliant reign (c. 350-376 A.D.). The great schism and splits within splits had proliferated into a plethora of sects among which the orthodox, Theravāda, had retreated to a few centers in South India and more properly to Śrī Laṅkā. The Mahāyanā had dominated northern India and across the Vindhyas, the Deccan. Buddhism was now confronted by a resurgent Brāhmaṇism with old Vedic rituals revived in courtly circles and Purāṇic Hinduism, especially in its *bhakti* form, had become the faith of the masses. Buddhism was now confined, more or less, to scattered monastic communities endowed by kings, their officials and a few merchants and bankers.[1] Like the Buddhist doctrine and monastic life, Buddhist art also had undergone significant changes in its intent, form and manifestations. One significant change, the absorption of folk ideas and their transmutation into classical form, is the object of this presentation.

What is the evidence on which we can formulate hypotheses on the nature and content of the Buddhist art of the Gupta Age? The chronological parameters for the art history of the Gupta period may be

1. For a survey of Buddhism in the Gupta Age see Gokhale, B.G., 'Buddhism in the Gupta Age' in Bardwell L. Smith (Ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi, 1983, pp. 129-53.

assumed to fall between 350 and 550 A.D. The geographical extension may be assumed to cover major part of northern, eastern, western India and the Deccan. Political control and cultural influences may not be accepted as coterminus, and it is in this sense that the monuments of the Bombay-Deccan may be included within the domain of the classical art associated with the Gupta Age. Though the Guptas had no political control over the Ajanta or Karle/Kanheri area, the art of these monuments shares in the general spirit of classicism reflected in the art of central India. Our evidence then, comes from examples of Buddhist sculptures from Sarnath, Mathurā, Sāñchī and western India/Deccan and the murals of Ajanta.[1]

Ideological Correlates of Gupta Buddhist Art

The major argument made here is that Gupta Buddhist art must be examined in the context of its ideological correlates and its technical achievements. The ideological dimension involves a transformation in the content and form or earlier folk ideas, attitudes and feelings into classical metaphysical and theological concepts. The technical dimension involves the transmutation of forms of earthiness, sheer and massive strength, obvious indulgence in pleasures of life and joviality into controlled strength, aristocratic/princely appearance and an intense spirituality. These are particularly evident in the concepts and figures of the Bodhisattvas, Nāgas, Kinnaras, Apsarās and the Goddess Hārīti. The Bodhisattva of the Pali Buddhist Jātakas is generically distinct from the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The Pali Jātaka Bodhisattva functions, more or less, as a convenient instrument for the accommodation and absorption of a mass of popular folk tales to convey a newly formalized Buddhistic ethic. The Bodhisattva of the Pali Jātakas and his *pāramitās* (perfections) belong to a late stratum in Pali canonical literature. The Gupta Bodhisattva is a person of transcendental wisdom and unbounded compassion (*prajñā* and *karuṇā*), ever skillful in devising appropriate means (*upāyakauśalya*)

1. Ḥarle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, Oxford, 1974, pp. 6-8.

in securing release for a suffering world. His iconographic form is the end product of a folk movement related to Yaksha worship based on ritual adoration (*pūjā*) and devotion (*bhakti*). The Gupta Bodhisattva is no longer just an attendant, but a savior in his own right. In this, wise folk ideas were transformed into a classical concept.

Much the same argument would apply to the adoption and accommodation of other folk ideas, such as the Yakshas and Yakshīs, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Apsarās and Hārīti and their integration into a classical world in terms of iconic and artistic idioms.

Transformation of Folk Ideas into Classical Form

From the early stages of its evolution as a religion, Buddhism comprised two distinct segments in an uneasy symbiosis. We may call these as the monastic / elite and the laity / folk. Already in the older part of the Nikāyas we encounter a fourfold enumeration of the Buddhist community, namely *bhikkhu / bhikkhuṇī,* and *upāsaka / upāsikā*—monks / nuns and male / female lay devotees. The influence of the lay groups on the development of Buddhist doctrine, monastic life and ritual art is one of the less explored themes in the study of Buddhism in India. Who were the Buddhist laity? They covered a wide spectrum, ranging from kings, queens and their courtiers to merchants, bankers, artisans and peasants, scattered across the entire urban / rural spread of the major areas of the sub-continent. Alongwith the monastic-lay paradigm we have, in social terms, the aristocratic and folk dimensions in Buddhistic social, and by implication, art history. Just as the doctrinal and ritual needs and demands of the monastic community and the laity were different, similar was the case in the life-styles and cultural ideas of the aristocracy and the common people. This is not to imply that a rigid and unwavering line separated the two, for there were differences and continuity dividing and joining the two. Rather, the point to be made is that the elites explicated categories of ideas and forms which emphasized or obscured aspects of ideas and forms of the culture of the common people. The transformation of folk

ideas into aristocratic or classical form was an on-going process in Buddhist history.[1]

From its very inception, Buddhism had to deal with two elements of the folk culture, folk deities and folk tales, through a process of accommodation, absorption and transformation. This was begun in the life-time of the Buddha himself, as suggested by the evidence from the Nikāyas. Alongwith the old Vedic gods such as Brahmā and Śakra / Indra, the Buddha speaks of a group of folk deities, the Yakshas and Yakshīs, Nāgas, Kinnaras and Gandharvas. Just as the Master referred to the Vedas with tolerance and sometimes sarcasm, he also makes use of folk tales which later appear in their Buddhistic garb as the Jātakas. These folk deities and tales provided a rich *repertoire* for embellishment and edification in the evolving Buddhist art. The Buddhist monuments of the earlier phase, the pre-Mahāyāna segment, reflect this process of absorption of folk deities and folk tales at Bharhut, Sāñchī, Bhaja, Karle, Kanheri and Amarāvatī. By the first century B.C., a new and powerful religious movement, *bhakti*, begins to dominate religious ideas and art-forms in India. Though some scholars have suggested that its roots lay in the old Vedic concepts of *śraddhā / saddhā*, it is more probable that the origins of the *bhakti* cult came from folk religions dwelling either at the periphery of hieratic religion or even beyond its pale.[2]

A.K. Coomaraswamy has suggested that the Yaksha cult was rooted in the *bhakti* sentiment. Pali literary evidence indicates the existence of abodes (temples) of the Yakshas (*bhavanas* and *āyatanas*) at some of which the Buddha himself seems to have sojourned from time to time. A number of Yakshas and Yakshīs are portrayed and labeled at Bharhut and Sāñchī. Coomaraswamy has also suggested that it is more fruitful to look for the origins of the Buddha / Bodhisattva icons from Mathurā in

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1. For development of Buddhism as a religion, see Gokhale, B.G., *Buddhism and Aśoka*, Baroda, 1948, pp. 25-57.

2. For *bhakti* in Buddhism see Gokhale, B.G., 'Bhakti in Early Buddhism' in Lele, J. (Ed.), *Journal of African and Asian Studies,* XV, 1/2, pp. 16-26.

earlier Yaksha prototypes. The morphology of the early Mathurā Buddha / Bodhisattva images suggests strong Yaksha resemblances. The transition from folk idea / form to classical icon was contrived by transforming the Yaksha into a yogī of a special Buddhist form through the delineation of the accepted marks of the Great Person—*mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇāni*—such as the *ushṇīsha-ūrṇā*, elongated ears and arms reaching to the knees—*ājānubāhu*.

Impact of the Yaksha Cult

Aspects of the old Yaksha cults facilitated an easy transition into Buddhism. Many of these Yakshas were regarded as special protectors of merchants, especially caravaneers. Of these, the most celebrated were Maṇibhadra and Pūrṇabhadra, and inscriptional and literary evidence indicates the existence of specially set up shrines to these Yakshas. They were worshipped in the *pūjā* mode of ritual involving offering of flowers, burning of lamps and ritual offerings of food. In the sculptures of Bharhut and Sāñchī there are representations of stūpas being honored in the form of *pūjā*, with figures before them who could be representatives of the common folk as well as royalty. The standing figures of Yakshas are indicated as attendants or guardians, whereas the Yakshīs are portrayed as symbols of fertility and prosperity.[1]

The concept of a Yaksha as an attendant / protector is specially noticeable in the case of Vajirapāṇi Yakkha, who figures in several suttas of the Nikāyas. He is particularly noted for his threat to anyone who refused to answer the Buddha's well-meant questions to split his head with his vajira (*vajra*). Buddhaghosha explains Vajirapāṇi as the name of Sakka, but this is perhaps a case of confusing one tradition (that of the Vedas) with another (the Yaksha tradition).[2] Now Vajirapāṇi emerges as a Bodhisattva in the Buddhist art of the period from Mathurā, Kanheri and particularly Ajanta. Artistic needs necessitated the positing of another

1. See Coomaraswamy, A.K., *Yakṣas*, New Delhi, 1971, Pt. I, pp. 4-28.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-31; for Bodhisattva concept see Warder, A.K., *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, 1970, pp. 355-60; Kashyap, J. (Ed.), *The Dīgha Nikāya*, Nalanda, 1958, p. 82.

attendant, who now appears as Padmapāṇi. The two symbols, the *vajra* (thunderbolt) and *padma* (lotus) have pre-Buddhistic folk associations. In the *Therīgāthā* there are verses attributed to the nun Vajirā (the name is significant), whose use of the simile of the chariot being the designation of an assemblage of its parts becomes standard method of interpretation of the early Buddhist views on the nature of the person. It is quoted with evident approval by Nāgasena in the *Milindapañha*.[1] Vajra, in folk understanding, was a symbol of primeval strength and power. The lotus occurs as a symbol of purity in innumerable similes in the Nikāyas. The Yaksha / Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi now emerges as the Being of Mercy who postpones his own Nirvāṇa and remains in the world to convey the notion of affirmation and celebration of life, if only to transcend it in the end. Walter Spink has suggested that the structural composition of Cave I at Ajanta must be understood as unitary in intention. The sense is that the entire structure was conceived as one whole, and the excavation itself, (the arrangement of the interior including the shrine and the murals) are organically related to each other. It is here that the folk elements are transformed and transmuted through the magic of the artists into a brilliant classicism seldom equalled elsewhere.[2] The Bodhisattvas are now princely figures complete with diadems or crowns and a profusion of jewelry. They are, in these murals, conceived in over life-size proportions surrounded by a teeming world of humans and quasi-divine figures. Heinrich Zimmer aptly observes: "The figure of the Bodhisattva has all the qualities that youth, high birth, noble character, and religious temperament can produce... strong masculine limbs; a broad chest; a well-set neck; a high intellectual forehead; large, meditative eyes; firm lips; and an elegant nose. The eyebrows slightly raised, and the highlight on the nose and chin give an air of spirituality to the countenance. The supple body is full of latent vigour. It is the youthful

1. Shastri, Dwarkadas (Ed.), *The Milinda Pañho*, Varanasi, 1979, p. 21.

2. Spink, W., 'Ajanta : A Brief History' in Pal (Ed.), *Aspects of Indian Art*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 49-58.

body of a noble prince, standing with a graceful bearing and filled with an ineffable sentiment of detachment among the joyful figures of life. On the head is a high crown or tiara with large blue sapphires, emblematic of royal birth.''[1] Mere masculinity of the earlier Yaksha figure is now translated into controlled strength and vigour; the earlier exuberance is transmuted into a sophisticated joy of life ensuing from cultivated royal or aristocratic origins.

The sentiment of *bhakti* toward the Bodhisattva was based in the devotee's faith and confidence in the Bodhisattva as capable of being a savior. Already by the middle of the third century of the Christian era Avalokiteśvara was firmly established as a cult figure. He is described as saving people from fire, flood and shipwreck. He saves travelling merchants from the depredations of robbers and helps childless women secure children. He wards off attacks from wild elephants, lions and cobras. The litany of this Bodhisattva is carved in a number of caves in Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad, an indication of the popularity of the cult. These aspects of the cult are closely related to the powers ascribed to some of the Yakshas, whose worship was very popular with merchants.[2]

Impact of Nāga Cult and Other Elements of Folk Genre

We may now refer to two other elements from the folk world being absorbed into the new classical Buddhism. One is the figure of the Nāga. At Sāñchī and Bharhut there are numerous representations of human figures surmounted by the hood of a cobra. In the *Mahāvagga* there is the story of the Nāga Muchalinda, who protected the Buddha from sun and rain as he sat meditating by raising his hood over the Buddha. The Nāga is associated with primeval waters and the process of creation,

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1. Zimmer, H., *The Art of Indian Asia*, I, New York, 1955, p. 189; also see Basham, A. L., 'The Evolution of the Concept of the Bodhisattva' in Kawamura, J. S. (Ed.), *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, Waterloo, Ontario, 1983, pp. 30-32.

2. Kern, H. (Trans.), *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, New York, 1963, pp. 406-09.

fertility and wealth.[1] Alongwith the Yakshas, Nāgas were worshipped in the folk tradition and were later accommodated in the evolving Buddhism as a religion of the laity. The finest classical expression of the Nāga cult is the beautiful sculpture depicting the Nāga king and his queen seated on a throne and attended by a female *chauri*-bearer in Cave XIX at Ajanta. This is a chaitya cave with numerous Buddha figures, and the sculpture of the Nāga king and his queen is on the left side wall. This panel may have been placed where it is either for its decorative effect or, more probable, it is an instance of the accommodation and absorption of a folk cult now rendered in a classical idiom of accepted iconographic poses, crowns and jewellery.

Cave II at Ajanta has a panel containing sculptures of Hārīti and Pañchika. The cave is a vihāra. Hāriti started out as an ogress married to the Yaksha Pañchika. Hārīti was in the habit of devouring children and was weaned away from her dreadful activity by the Buddha. From being a destroyer of children, she was transformed into their protector and was worshipped for that role. She is also a symbol of fertility and perhaps that of the ancient mother goddess. As in the case of the Nāga panel, the placing of the Hārīti panel in a vihāra cave is also an instance of accommodation/absorption of a folk cult into classical Buddhism.

The other elements of the folk genre are to be found in the numerous *mithuna* scenes involving Apsarās, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Yakshas. The *mithuna* or erotic dalliance is pre-Buddhistic in its origins. It signifies security, wealth, protection and prosperity. The motif formed an integral part of folk religion and art, and Buddhism simply accommodated it into its iconic representational world associated with sacred art. These representations are amorous in intention and manifestation, but are not orgiastic as is the case with Khajuraho and Konark.[2]

1. *Mahāvagga*, I. 3.

2. See Gokhale, B. G., 'The Mithuna Motif in Early Buddhist Art' in *Indica*, XIII, 1/2, March-September 1976, pp. 49-58.

Use of Jātaka and Avadāna Folk Tales

We may now turn to a discussion of the use of the Jātakas in the art of the Gupta Age. Ajanta has at least twenty Jātakas and two Avadānas in varying states of preservation. The Jātakas are Khantivādi, Sibi, Miga, Mahājanaka, Syāma, Sutasoma, Mahāhaṁsa, Chhaddanta, Mahāumagga, Nigrodhamiga, Mahākapi, Mahisa, Hatthī, Mātuposaka and the celebrated Vessantara. The two Avadānas are Siṁhal and Pūrṇa. The folk tale is a vital part of folk literature and the content of most of these stories precede the emergence of Buddhism. The process of absorption of these pre-Buddhistic folk tales into a species of Buddhist literature was contrived through the use of the Bodhisattva motif. Each Jātaka is structured into five parts — *Pachchuppanna vatthu, atīta vatthu, gāthā, veyyākaraṇa* and *samodhāṇa*. The first explains how the story came to be told by the Buddha as the occasion is related to an incident involving a monk or nun, king or merchant or Devadatta. The second part has the story proper. The third part, regarded as the most ancient stratum, either summarizes the contents of the story of the past and/or expresses its moral. The fourth part is an exposition of the meaning of the verses. In the final part, the main characters are identified, such as the Buddha, Devadatta, or some other person.[1]

The inclusion of these stories in the *repertoire* of Buddhist art is based on their twofold nature of being a vehicle for the transmission of Buddhist ethical ideas and values, and their folk origins and wide circulation among the laity. The ideas emphasized are *karma*, rebirth, non-injury, charity and compassion. Many of these stories figure in the art of Sāñchī and Bharhut, Amarāvatī and Gandhāra, indicating their physical spread over widely separated parts of the sub-continent. The most famous of these stories are the Vessantara, Sibi, Mahājanaka, Khantivādi, Chhaddanta, Nigrodhamiga and Mahākapi. Pre-Gupta art had already

1. See Jones, J. G., *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, London, 1979, pp. 3-29; Cone, M. and Gombrich, R. F., *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara*, Oxford, 1977, pp. xvii-xxxv.

fixed the major components of the stories to be delineated in art.

Buddhist art, from its Sāñchī-Bharhut phase to Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa, had been structured in its narrative content into two distinct but inter-related parts. One of these components was the narrative of the Buddha story, first through the use of specific symbols and later through iconic representation of the Buddha. The major incidents selected for depiction were the conception, birth, renunciation, enlightenment, preaching, and final passing away of the Buddha. To these were added incidents such as the Muchalinda, Ajātasattu's visit, conversion of the Kassapa brothers, conversion and re-accommodation of Nanda, Buddha's visit to Kapilavatthu, the Sāvatthī miracle, the Devadatta episodes, the Pārileyyaka story, and the defeat of Māra. These together formed the classical conspectus. Alongside of this there stood the Jātaka material. A gradually evolving consensus from Sāñchī-Bharhut to Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa seems to have settled on a specified number of stories to be regarded as standard contents of this folk *repertoire*. These stories were the Chhadanta, Vessantara, Mahākapi, Syāma, Sibi, Champeyya, Sasa, Mahājanaka and Vidurapaṇḍita Jātakas.[1] At Sāñchī-Bharhut ''the method of narrating the stories is the simplest, most direct, and the language most unaffected. Indeed, men and women of Bharhut have almost a tribal simplicity....they do not express any emotion; nor are they idealized in any way. Now, these are characteristics also of the Jātaka stories themselves, and indeed of all tribal and folk stories of the world.'' What is noteworthy is the 'primitiveness' of portrayal.[2]

The reasons for the inclusion of these folk tales are obvious. First,

1. For identification of the Jātakas and Avadānas see Gupte, R.S. and Mahajan B.D., *Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad Caves*, Bombay, 1962, Chapter V; for *Jātakas* at Sāñchī see Marshall, J., *A Guide to Sāñchī*, Calcutta, 1955, pp. 52, 58, 59, 78, 81; Mitra, D., *Sāñchī*, New Delhi, 1973, pp. 25, 27, 29; for Bharhut see Cunningham, A., *The Stūpa of Bharhut*, Varanasi, 1962, pp. 50-51; for Amarāvatī, Barrett, D., *Sculptures from Amarāvatī in the British Museum*, London, 1954, pp. 72, 73; for Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa, Krishana Murthy, K., *Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa*, Delhi, 1977, pp. 12, 79.

2. Ray, N. R., *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 65, 68.

there was their tremendous popularity. Secondly, there was their dramatic content. And finally, their availability for use in communicating a Buddhist ethic and ethos. These tales then provided a means of bringing together hieratic and folk elements in Buddhist art and culture. The perceptible changes are in the domain of narrative style, for the content and message were long fixed. The cult image was conceived and executed in hieratic tones and style. They were controlled by the 'literary' quality of the cult image. The narrative Jātaka style was freer, more flowing, rhythmical and earthy. The scenes depicted had exuberance and vitality, and an uncontrolled sensuousness. Sheila L. Weiner has argued that with the growth and preponderance of the cult image, and its refinement from Mathurā to Sarnath, there was a proportionate decline in the vitality of the narrative tradition concerned with the Jātaka tales.[1] This may well be valid in sculptural representations of the Jātakas from Sāñchī-Bharhut to the Krishna Valley. In sculpture, because of the exigential space, the technique of continuous narration (wherein space and time had to be telescoped into a given frame-work, increasing constraints on uncontrolled exuberance and sensuousness) had become increasingly essential because of the preponderance of the cult iconic representations. In the art of the murals different material conditions prevailed. When we encounter the Jātaka illustrations at Ajanta, the old exuberance, vitality and sensuousness re-emerge. The expression is no longer limited. The emergence of the new Buddhism of the Mahāyāna variety based on the emotion of *bhakti* also helped accentuate the elements of exuberance, vitality and sensuousness. *Saṁsāra* and *Nirvāṇa* are no longer sharply severed and unrelated parts of an ideological continum. They are, rather, two sides of the same coin and are finally joined together in meaning and expression. The cult images and Jātaka murals now appear as aspects of an integrated whole, a single *weltanschauung*. The ancillary and illustrative Jātaka material is now worked into an integrated structural whole, and the result is a classicism of intention and technique. The

1. Weiner, Sheila L., *Ajanta*, Berkeley, 1977, pp. 80-81.

Jātaka-Avadāna material is no longer regarded as a 'frieze' of decorative or illustrative value, but exists in its own right as an essential and organic part of the Buddhist story. Classicism is now expressed through a vastness of conception and technique. Just as the old Yaksha morphology of the Buddha / Bodhisattva representation is transformed into a royal or princely anatomy and physiology, the characters and scenes of the Jātaka-Avadāna folk elements are transmuted into a 'feudal' classical idiom. Scenes are spread out over large spaces. Figures of humans, animals, birds, gods and semi-divine beings, flowers and plants crowd the scene. The sequential parts of the narrative are now conventionally spelled out and separated by the use of walls, rocks or trees, thereby helping the narrative to gently ease or blend into a continum of space and time. The figures are no longer tribal prototypes, earthy or 'primitive', but acquire a classical appearance in purpose and expression. The earlier folk ideas, material frames and intentions are now transformed into a world of classical earnestness, controlled movement and restrained sensuousness. The classical spirit finally subsumes the folk world symbolized by the unsullied and pristine beauty of the lotus rising from the depths of agitated water and glutinous earth.

Chapter Seven

Free-standing Pillars of the Gupta Age

Origin and Types of Free-standing Pillars

In ancient India, pillars were used not only as the integral part of a structure but also as free-standing sculptures usually to meet some religious or political need. The erection of free-standing pillars was undertaken on a large scale by Aśoka. However, it could not have been the result of the Persian impact as some early scholars surmised. According to D.R. Bhandarkar, "the erection of pillars independent and not forming part of any edifices seems to have originated in India alone and is not found in Western Asia or Europe before the time of the Roman emperors."[1] In India the tradition of erecting pillars to commemorate a victory (*jayastambha*), or sacrifice (*yūpa*), or in honour of a deity (such as *garuḍadhvaja*), is a very ancient one. Though no pre-Mauryan column has yet been found, references to *yūpas* are abundant in the Vedic literature. Their earliest stone specimens found from Nandsa, Barnala, Badva and Bichpuria in Rajasthan go back only to the third century A.D.,[2] probably because in the earlier days the *yūpas* were made of wood, as laid down in the *Śrauta*- and *Gṛhya-sūtras*.

The earliest specimen of a pillar erected in honour of a Brāhmaṇical deity (*dhvajastambha*) is the famous monolithic column at Besnagar set up in the second century B.C. in honour of Vāsudeva by Heliodorus, a

1. *MASI*, No. 4.

2. For these *yūpas* and the records engraved on them cf. Goyal, S.R., *Prāchīna Bhāratīya Abhilekha Saṁgraha*, Jaipur, 1982, pp. 275-92.

Greek, who calls himself a Bhāgavata or a worshipper of Bhagavata or Kṛshṇa-Vishṇu. As for *jayastambhas* or victory pillars, we have no definite archaeological evidence of their existence at such an early period. According to S.P. Gupta, it is likely that the very idea of raising victory columns may have originated out of the *yūpas*. There are sacrifices like the *Rājasūya* and *Aśvamedha* which only a *Chakravartī* monarch was authorized to perform. Such sacrifices necessarily followed an extensive conquest made by a ruler, and the *yūpas* erected for them had a special significance. S.R. Goyal thinks it quite possible that the Aśokan pillar on which the Prayāga *praśasti* is engraved was used as a *yūpa* in the Aśvamedha of Samudragupta.[1] In the course of time, however, with the popularity of Buddhism (among other reasons), such sacrifices became less and less common, and the idea of raising pillars in commemoration of such events seems to have grown more popular, with or without the sacrifices. Even at the time of Kālidāsa the word *yūpa* had not lost its significance as a *jayastambha*.[2]

Jayastambhas, that is the pillars raised to celebrate or associated with the victory of a king, were also called *kīrtistambhas*. The Ásokan pillar at Allahabad, on which the eulogy of Samudragupta is engraved, has been described as the raised arm of the earth (*bhuvo bāhur-ayam-uchchhritaḥ stambhaḥ*) indicating the spread of his fame (*kīrti*) in both the worlds.[3] In other words, it is claimed that it was his *kīrtistambha*.

The free-standing lofty pillars in front of the chaitya-halls at Karle, Kanheri, etc. were also called *kīrtistambhas*. As pointed out by V.S. Agrawala, ''such pillars formed an integral part of the earliest *chaitya-prāsāda* architecture. This is borne out by the description of the *prāsāda* in Laṅkā, of which a monumental pillar formed a distinguishing land-mark :..... (Sundara. 43.17).

''We may go even earlier, and we find that the stūpa monument,

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1. Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967, p. 188.
2. Gupta, S.P., *The Roots of Indian Art*, Delhi, 1980, p. 41.
3. *Corpus*, III, revised ed., p. 215.

when standing under the open sky, had also its free standing pillars. The mounds of thick yellow clay rammed as hard as stone, at Lauriya Nandangarh offer typical examples. Their contents indicate that they were burial mounds. In the particular mound in which a piece of gold-leaf with the figure of the Earth Goddess was found, a little below that level was discovered a long hollow shaft 10'' in diameter showing that once a wooden pillar was placed there. In another adjoining mound the shaft of the wooden pillar was found *in situ*. We have another instance in the Aśokan pillar installed in front of one of the Gateways of the Great Sāñchī Stūpa. Probably reference to a wooden pillar (*sthūṇā*) associated with a mound of earth raised over the relics of the departed ones may be traced to the *Ṛigveda* X.18.13. The Sabhāparvan refers to such a pillar erected on the top of a *śmaśāna chaitya* as *chaityayūpa*, the two together invoked as a befitting *upamāna* in point of loftiness to Vishṇu riding on Garuḍa.

''Thus in accordance with a well-established old custom the *chaitya-prāsāda* was provided with its associative column. This explains the existence of *kīrtistambhas* in front of *kīrti* excavations.''[1]

That even Aśokan pillars were erected before *chaitya prāsādas* is now conceded by many scholars. Earlier it was generally supposed that Aśoka erected his pillars along the highways. But A. Ghosh and N.P. Chakravarty have argued[2] that Aśokan pillars were meant to commemorate the important events in the lives of the Buddhas, present and past, as also to form part of the stūpa complexes. About two decades ago S.P. Gupta systematically analysed the entire evidence and came to the conclusion that by and large, wherever they are found, the Aśokan pillars form part of the *stūpa* or *chaityagṛha* complex. Presently, in some of the examples, if they are not found along with a *stūpa* or *chaityagṛha*, it appears to be due to some other reasons, such as vandalism and ravages of time. As a corollary, pillars are likely to have been erected along with

1. Agrawala, V.S., *Studies in Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, pp. 242-43.
2. Quoted by Gupta, S.P., *op.cit.*, p. 37.

the *stūpas* and *chaityagṛhas* by Aśoka himself, presumably in the beginning without any kind of inscription over them; since these pillars were regarded as sacred, his edicts were engraved on some of them later. May be, erecting pillars in front of a *stūpa* or *chaityagṛha* was an older practice; may be in the pre-Aśokan times wooden pillars were installed in front of the *stūpas*, but there is no proof for this practice in the Buddhist literature. The Kanakamuni's *stūpa* which Aśoka enlarged (Nigali Sagar) received a pillar at the hands of Aśoka himself.[1]

The practice of erecting free-standing pillars called *dhvajastambhas* in the courtyard or outside the sanctuary was adopted in the Brāhmaṇical sects and some examples of such pillars of the Gupta age are now extant. For example, in Udaigiri Cave 19 there were originally two tall columns well to the front, although now only one survives. They were possibly *dhvajastambhas* or free-standing supports for emblems of the divinities.[2]

Bijayagadh Yūpastambha of the Gupta Age

The practice of erecting sacrificial *yūpas* continued in the Gupta age. The Bijayagadh (near Bayana, in Rajasthan) monolithic red sandstone pillar which contains an inscription of the year (Mālava era) 428 (=371 A.D.) stands on a rubble masonry platform which is about 13'6'' high and 9'2'' square at the top. The height of the pillar above the plinth is 26'3''. The base of the pillar is square to a height of 3'8'' and above it, it is octagonal for a length of 22'7'' and then tapers off to a point. The extreme top is broken off but a metal spike, which projects from it, indicates that it was surmounted by a capital. According to the inscription engraved on it, it was set up as a *yūpa* on the occasion of the ceremony of Puṇḍarīka sacrifice performed by Vishṇuvardhana of the Varika tribe.

Use of Aśokan Pillar as Kīrtistambha of Samudragupta

More than half a dozen *dhvajastambhas* that support (or once supported)

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
2. Williams, Joanna G., *The Art of Gupta India*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 87-88 (fig. 8, pl. 116).

an emblem or image of the deity, and *kīrtistambhas* that were erected for engraving the eulogy (*praśasti*) of the kings, belonging to the Gupta age are still extant. To some extent they are like the Maurya pillars and their sculptors were evidently influenced by the Maurya pillars which were standing at places like Sarnath and Sāñchī for everybody to see. The fact that the very number of the columns erected in the Gupta age is as great as under any post-Maurya dynasty proves that the kings of the Gupta age also followed the policy of proclaiming their deeds and glory by such means. The statement of Harisheṇa that the pillar (Allahabad pillar of Aśoka) on which the *praśasti* of Samudragupta was engraved, was, as if "the raised arm of the earth, proclaiming as it were, that the fame (of Samudragupta) having pervaded the entire surface of the world with (its) rise caused by the conquest of the whole earth, has... repaired from here (i.e. from this world) to the abode of (Indra)"[1] clearly brings out the psychology of the Gupta rulers towards such pillars and suggests that they recognised such pillars as imperial symbols.

Meharauli Vishṇudhvaja of Chandra

The best example of the Gupta *dhvajastambhas* is the Vishṇu *dhvaja*, an iron pillar, now standing near the Qutb Mīnār at Meharauli, just outside Delhi. It stands 22 ft. above the ground, and as its depth under the pavement is only 20 in., its total height is 23 ft. 8 in. Its diameter at the base is 16.4 in., and at the capital 12.05 in. The capital is 3'6'' high, and is sharply and clearly wrought into the lotiform. Many of the older foreign travellers supposed the pillar to be a casting made of brass or bronze, but the discovery that the material is pure malleable iron, which must have been forged, filled experts with admiration for the mechanical skill capable in accomplishing so great a work.[2] In 1897 Smith observed: "It is not many years since the production of such a pillar would have been an impossibility in the largest foundries of the world, and even now there

1. *Corpus*, III, pp. 218-19.
2. Smith, V.A., in *JRAS*, 1897, pp. 1 ff.

are comparatively few where a similar mass of metal could be turned out.''[1]

The questions whether or not the Iron Pillar occupies its original position, and if not, where was it originally erected, are intriguing. The inscription engraved on it expressly states that the pillar was erected as the lofty standard of the divine Vishṇu on a hill (*giri*), known by the name of Vishṇupada. This implies that the monument was erected in a conspicuously commanding position on the summit of a hill sufficiently isolated to bear a distinctive name. The pillar now stands in a practically level courtyard, situated in a depression with rising ground on each side. Consequently it must be supposed that the pillar was moved from its original site on a hill to its present site in a hollow. The place where the hill known as Vishṇupada existed must have been a well-known spot frequented by Vaishṇava pilgrims, within the Gupta dominions, and not very remote from Delhi. All the conditions of such a position are satisfied by Mathurā. That city is less than hundred-twenty kilometers from the Qutb Mīnār, was within the boundary of the Gupta empire, has many hills and mounds in or adjoining the city precincts, is one of the most ancient cities of India, and has been from time immemorial the site of famous temples of Vishṇu, and a centre of Vaishṇava worship. Inscriptions of Chandragupta II and of his son Kumāragupta I have been found at Mathurā. For these reasons it seems to be extremely probable that the pillar was originally erected at Mathurā. The Katra mound, where the magnificent temple of Vishṇu under the name of Keśava once stood, may have been the *Vishṇupadagiri* mentioned in the inscription.[2]

A major problem that this inscription presents is the identity of the ruler called Chandra, whose exploits from ''beyond the seven mouths

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1. *Ibid.* For metal sculptures of the Gupta age, cf. Agrawala, P.K., *Gupta-kālīna Kalā evaṁ Vāstu*, Varanasi, 1994. The general impression, which is found repeated even in research works, that the iron of the Meharauli pillar has not rusted at all, is not quite accurate, for parts of its portion buried in the ground and the cavity in the square portion of the capital have become somewhat rusted.

2. Smith, *op.cit.*

of the Indus'' to Vaṅga (Bengal) and upto the Southern Sea, are described in this epigraph. Most scholars of the older generation identified him with Chandragupta II but in recent years S.R. Goyal has very cogently argued that it is likely that these exploits are those of Samudragupta, a view with which now scholars like B.Ch. Chhabra, Munish Chandra Joshi, S.B.Deo and a host of others agree.[1]

The Meharauli capital in many ways reminds one of the Maurya capitals. It consists of seven parts, namely, a reeded bell, a thin plain disc, three discs with serrated edges, another thin plain disc and a square block. As observed by Joanna Williams : ''The capital, lotiform here as on all these pillars of the Gupta period, demonstrates that the Aśokan model remained in force for this *genre* in a way it did not for architectural columns. The form of the lotus on the Mehrauli capital is relatively close to Maurya ones, except that the petal edges are all rounded (rather than round alternating with angular ones) and the 'neck' or constricted portion above is not as deeply inset as on Aśokan originals. This neck consists of a twisted band found also as early as the Sāñcī Maurya Lion Capital.[2] Above this rise three fluted forms, each slightly different in profile. The lower one, precedented by a Śuṅga-period capital from Besnagar,[3] suggests the broad-grooved version of the *āmalaka* form that was to serve as a capital at Mukuṅdara and in the western Deccan. The upper cogged elements in the Mehrauli capital, taken together, may form a vase, fluted on its rim, a member occurring at Besnagar at roughly this same time.[4] Together these shapes suggest the rich ambiguity of connotations inherent in elements treated with formal harmony. Above the topmost square block, an emblem of the god Viṣṇu would presumably have completed the capital.''[5] This emblem was presumably Garuḍa.

1. For their observations vide, Joshi, Munish Chandra, Gupta, S.K. and Goyal, Shankar (eds.), *King Chandra and the Meharauli Pillar*, Meerut, 1989.
2. Marshall and Foucher, *Monuments of Sāñchī*, pl. 107.
3. Cunningham, *ASI*, X (1874-1877), pl. xiv.
4. Williams, Joanna, *op.cit.*, pl. 47.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Free-standing Gupta Age Pillars of Sāñchī, Bhitari, Lathiya, Kahaum and Eran

Another *dhvaja* pillar, that may be assigned to the reign of Kumāragupta I, was found at Sāñchī.[1] This was inscribed with the name of an unidentified donor in fifth-century script. Thus, the pillar was not a royal dedication. Comparing it with the Maurya pillars Joanna Williams states: The lotus, abacus, and lions are all so close to the Maurya capital of the same site that it is clear that this directly emulated that Aśokan model, rather than those of the south gateway of Stūpa 1 or of Sāñchī 17. There are, of course, differences from the Maurya sources here, particularly a softer carving and loss of articulation (such as in the lions' legs and manes). Minor changes are wrought in the twisted band above the lotus, which becomes the common twisted garland. Moreover, the disc at the top rests on a block covered with foliage of the Gupta type, in particular so similar to that of the four Buddhas of Stūpa 1[2] that a date close to theirs is probable. Thus the Sāñchī capital shows a general but not slavish fidelity to the Maurya model of the same site.

Bhitari (Ghazipur dist., U.P., 25 km. north-east of Varanasi) is well-known for its inscribed red sandstone *dhvajastambha* of Skandagupta. Discovered probably in 1834 it records the installation of an image of god Śārṅgin (Vishṇu) under the name of perhaps Kumārasvāmin called after Kumāragupta I and allotment to the idol, of the village in which the column stands.

The Bhitari pillar clearly indicates that the Maurya tradition was not yet altogether extinct. The Maurya lotus here, as at Sāñchī, is followed with general integrity, although angular and rounded edges are not differentiated as on the originals. The flattened profile, with neck and curve of the lotus relatively little indented and with a squarish upper bulge, likewise betrays the fact that this is a post-Maurya work.[3]

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1. *Ibid.*, pl. 141.
2. *Ibid.*, pl. 110.
3. *Ibid.*, pl. 142, p. 97; Agrawala, P.K., *op.cit.*, p. 38.

At the village of Lathiya (about 50 km. east of Varanasi, in Zamania dist., U.P.) there stands a sandstone column which is supposed to be a sister-column of the Prahladpur inscribed pillar now in the Sanskrit University, Varanasi. The Lathiya column shows a yet flatter version of the lotus petals.[1] "The straightness of the profile is increased by the outset band immediately below the lotus and by the ring above. The upper surviving member of the Latiya column consists of eight addorsed lions,... apparently surmounted by a Janus carving of two human torsos with arms raised, now on the ground. Too little is clear for identification, although a Garuḍa is at least one possibility."[2]

At Kahaum (Deoria dist., U.P.) is found another *dhvaja* pillar of the time of Skandagupta dated G.E. 141 (=460 A.D.). The inscription mentions Skandagupta, but it records not his exploits but rather the motivation of the donor Madra, who dedicated this column with five images of Tīrthaṅkaras 'when the world's troubles led him to seek religious merit'. Thus a personal and private twist is given to the concept of the *kīrtistambha*.[3] The column contains five standing naked figures. These are distinctly Jaina images probably of Ādinatha, Śāntinātha, Neminātha, Pārśvanātha and Mahāvīra. They are in all probability the five images of the Ādikartṛs or Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras referred to in the inscription. "The column differs from Maurya ones in its extremely tapered form and in the division of the shaft into a series of differentiated sections (eight-sided, sixteen-sided, and round), the uppermost marked with a foliate band. ... On the whole, the Kahaum pillar transmutes significantly both the form and the content of earlier *stambhas*."[4]

The Eran (Sagar dist., M.P.) pillar[5] is a large monolith red-sandstone column which stands near the well-known group of temples about half a mile to the west of the village. It contains an inscription of

1. Williams, Joanna, *op.cit.*, pl. 143.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98; Agrawala, P.K., *op.cit.*, p. 39.
5. Williams, Joanna, *op.cit.*, pl. 145.

the Gupta year 165 (=484 A.D.) referring to Mahārāja Suraśmichandra, a feudatory of Budhagupta and the local Mahārāja Mātṛvishṇu and his younger brother Dhanyavishṇu. The inscription itself describes the pillar as a *dhvajastambha* of Janārdana (Vishṇu). The inscription is engraved on the lower square part of the 43' long monolithic column. ''The column rises from a square shaft,... above this is a short octagonal section. The next member has almost entirely lost its lotiform character, with no indication that the bottom represents petals at all. The curve of this capital is moreover very flaccid, the twisted band at the top only slightly inset. Above this occurs a second small octagonal section (the kind of logical sequence we have seen in the columns of Sāñcī), followed by three square members. Lions remain at the top, their faces more grotesque than any seen so far. At the very summit is the emblem of Viṣṇu, apparently a Janus image of the Garuḍa bird holding a snake. The wheel above lends itself to three interpretations : Viṣṇu's discus, a sun disc appropriate for the solar Garuḍa, and possibly the *cakra* of the *cakravartin* (although that claim on the part of the local rulers would seem pretentious). Perhaps several subjects were originally intended, for ambivalent imagery was entirely in keeping with Maurya capitals themselves, notably that of Sārnāth.''[1]

As observed by Joanna Williams : ''At Eran, the strong curves of the snake and of the legs and the tightly curling hair are consonant with images of Mathurā and Sārnāth at this point, although the canon of proportions is slightly heavier here. The images also resemble the symmetrical but equally strong and curvilinear Viṣṇu at Eran. On the whole, this area, while slipping from Gupta political control, seems not markedly out of touch with the style at Sārnāth and its hinterland.''[2]

Kīrtistambhas of Yaśodharman-Vishṇuvardhana

A pair of monolithic columns of sandstone were found lying in a field in

1. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
2. *Ibid.*; Agrawala, P.K., *op.cit.*, p. 36.

the village Sondani situated about four km. to the south-east of Mandasor. Both of them contain the inscriptions of the Mālava emperor Yaśodharman-Vishṇuvardhana (known date 532 A.D.).[1] One of the pillars is 39'3'' n length and originally had a lion capital. It is possible that the capital was surmounted by a statue or statues, now lost. The second column is now broken and its full length cannot be determined. It was also topped by a lion capital which was also probably surmounted by a statue or statues. The finish at the top of both the pillars suggests that they were not connected by a beam after the fashion of a *toraṇa* or arched gateway and there are no traces of a temple to which they could have belonged. They therefore must be put under the category of *jayastambhas* or *kīrtistambhas*.

1. Agrawala, P.K., *ibid.*, p. 42.

Chapter Eight

Numismatic Art of the Imperial Guptas

The Gupta phase of Indian art is outstanding for its classical quality owing to the increased aesthetic consciousness of the times which was obtained by refining and perfecting the technique of the earlier Mathurā school. In it the dominant element of religious ritualism was moderated by accommodating with it in balanced measure the elements of devotion and worldly life. The unity so achieved between the purely spiritual and the temporal made it possible for the creative knowledge to be systematized and formulated, enabling all ideas and sentiments to be expressed through art with ease and completeness. Gupta art is at once energetic and serene. In it rough and unwieldy elements of the Kushāṇa sculpture become refined and dignified.

Gupta gold coins are sculptures in bas-relief on a minute scale, produced by die-cutting. The factual statements in them about the Guptas are rendered in a setting of decorative devices, which not only emphasize the purpose of the statements, but also give them dignity and refinement. Masterpieces of design and artistic technique, the Gupta coins are immensely superior to the Indian coins of any other period from the point of view of the variety and originality of their motifs, rich creative imagination, aesthetic quality, superb craftsmanship, and the life they unfold, testifying to the high level of cultural attainments. Such excellence could only emerge from the cultivated taste of the royalty under whose patronage art became a vehicle for the expression of thought and feeling. Gupta coinage was in a way the personal achievement of its creators,

whose distinction lies in conceiving its possibilities and giving them concrete shape with a realism and adequacy it seems impossible to surpass. It constitutes one of the most characteristic series of Indian coinage, a product worthy of a great civilization as the Gupta civilization was.

The study of Indian coins, including the Gupta coins, as objects of art is still in infancy. Most scholars, excepting some, such as B.N. Mukherjee,[1] who have written on the subject, have usually described the coin types or have tried to reconstruct the picture of material life as gleaned from them.[2] But the assessment of coins as works of art is something else.

Difficulties in the Study of Gupta Numismatic Art

The study of coins as works of art becomes difficult because before the age of the Imperial Guptas Indian coins (barring those of the Indo-Greeks and some other foreign rulers), were not looked upon as objects of art, even by those who produced them. The transformation of coins into objects of art was facilitated by the artistry of obverse and reverse devices, excellence of the relevant die or mould(s), purity and/or suitability of the required metal and efficiency in the technique of minting. Discussing the difficulties of the ancient mint-masters in producing artistic coins, B.N. Mukherjee observes : ''Highly sophisticated and largely mechanised process of manufacturing followed in a modern organised mint can maintain a uniform standard in production on a mass scale, the like of which could not have been witnessed in a manually operated mint of

1. Cf. Mukherjee, B.N., in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. III, Part II, edited by Majumdar, R.C. and Dasgupta, K.K., New Delhi, 1982, pp. 1415 ff.

2. For coins as a source for the study of material life of the Gupta age see Motichandra, in A.S. Altekar's *The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, Bombay, 1954, pp. cli-vi; Chakraborty, Swati, *Socio-Religious and Cultural Study of the Ancient Indian Coins*, Ch. 5; Maity, S.K., 'Panoramic Culture of Early Indian Coins', *JNSI*, XLIX, 1987, pp. 1-12; *Gupta Civilization — A Study*, Calcutta, 1974, Ch. IV; Vidya Prakash, 'Some Aspects of Material Life on Gupta Coins', *JNSI*, XXIII, pp. 265-96.

early or medieval age. Moreover, ill-organised unofficial and sometimes also official mints were often not interested in turning out coins of artistic quality. Thus, a vast number of pieces of coined metal of early and medieval periods do not interest students of the history of fine arts. However, the number of quality products of these ages is not negligible. Many of such coins, produced in well organised mints (under the supervision of appreciating as well as exacting authorities) and from dies prepared by highly skilled and talented artists, can be classed as masterpieces of visual art. These indicate traits of numismatic art and its relationship with other media of plastic art.''[1]

It is a well-known fact that the Gupta gold coins betray the impact of coinages of the Imperial Kushāṇas and their immediate successors. Some classes of tribal coins, datable to the third-fourth century A.D., also betray Kushāṇa influence though their artistic quality cannot be compared with that of the Gupta coins.[2] Gupta artists are known to have gradually Indianized or replaced foreign devices, attributes and, to some extent, dresses and ornaments. The enthroned foreign goddess Ardoksho was gradually replaced by the Indian goddess of prosperity, Lakshmī or Śrī, seated on lotus,[3] while the goddess on lion began to appear as Durgā Siṁhavāhinī in various postures.[4] The iconography of the goddess holding a lotus in her hands but riding a lion depicted on Gupta coins, however, presents some difficulties. She has been identified as Siṁhavāhinī Lakshmī by R.K. Dikshit,[5] as Śaivī Lakshmī by D.N. Shukla[6] and as Vaishṇavī Mahālakshmī riding a lion by S.N. Misra.[7]

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1. Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, p. 1415.
2. For a detailed study of art in tribal coinage, see Dasgupta, K.K., *A Tribal History of Ancient India*, p. 247.
3. Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pl. V, No. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, pl.VI, No. 1 ff.
5. *JNSI*, XXVI, p. 102.
6. Shukla, D.N., *Hindu Canons of Iconography and Paintings*, p. 311.
7. *JNSI*, XXX, pp. 80 ff.

Gupta Coinage as a Branch of Sculpture

The coinage of the Gupta empire became an important medium of art having intimate relationship with other branches of creative activities. As observed by Mukherjee, ''Several stylistic features betrayed by well executed figures on coins correspond to those of the Gupta sculpture. Nevertheless, the Gupta die-cutters had their own technique for hewing out in negative the relevant figures on the die in such a way as to impart a sense of three dimensions to them in their positive impressions on the flat flans of the coins.''[1]

In portrayal of human figures the Gupta coins do not show the realism of the Greek coins. The Gupta die-engravers laid more stress on idealisation rather than on life-like representation, and therefore their coins express the pleasing vitality and idealism that was the characteristic of the artistic impulse of the age.

Figures on early Gupta gold pieces are in fairly high relief, apparently as a result of the use of well-intagliated dies. However, sometimes they lack physiognomical details, due to defect in sculpting the relevant dies or in striking the coins. Differences between physiognomical details of the early kings represented on gold coins suggest that they were supposed to be portraits. However, on silver coins we find only conventionalised busts though representations of Chandragupta II on his copper coins are often somewhat life-like.[2]

There is a great similarity between the poses and postures of figures found on the Gupta coins and in sculpture of the Gupta age. As pointed out by Mukherjee, as in sculpture, gliding linearism and a subtle sense of movement characterise the figures appearing on the Gupta gold coins as well.[3] Well-proportioned human figures are shown as sitting or standing in various postures.[4] Kings with their muscles rippling under

1. Mukherjee, B.N., *op.cit.*, p.1420.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1417.
3. Allan, *CGD*, pl. I f., especially pl. V f.
4. *Ibid.*

skin, exude strength, robustness and vitality.[1] The figures of queens and goddesses have soft and graceful slender forms and refined (often sensuous) contours.[2] Divine figures on gold pieces often radiate spiritual sublimity.[3] All these characteristics are also discernible in well executed stone and some stucco and terracotta sculptures of the Gupta age, particularly in those produced following the Sarnath or Mathurā idioms.[4]

Artistic Excellence of the Coin Devices : Anthropomorphic Figures

Very few Gupta kings were content with a single coin type. From the multiplicity of types it seems that the coinage received the special attention of the monarch himself. It was, therefore, but natural that while choosing the devices for the bewildering varieties of coins,[5] the Gupta mint-masters often projected the valour and skill of their patrons and commemorated important events of their lives. Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type issued by Chandragupta I or, what is more likely, by Samudragupta,[6] the Battle-axe type of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I, Tiger-slayer type of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I, Lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I, Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer type of Kumāragupta I, Rhinoceros-slayer type of Kumāragupta I, Aśvamedha type of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I, etc. are examples of such types.[7]

A depiction of a male and female figures in apposition conversing in the natural manner of actual life, shown on the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type, is naturally of great human interest. It is much superior to the stylized conjugate busts of kings and queens, as one finds on the

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1. *Ibid.*, pl. VI, no. 15; IX, no. 10; pl. X, no. 9; pl. XIV, no. 2; pl. XIX, no. 13, etc.
2. *Ibid.*, pl. VIII, no. 10; pl. IX, no. 14; pl. XIII, no. 8, etc.
3. *Ibid.*, pl. VI, no. 11; pl. XV, no. 15.
4. Saraswati, S.K., *A Survey of Indian Sculpture*, 2nd edn., p. 133 f.
5. For a description of the various coin types of the Imperial Guptas, cf. Goyal, S.R., *An Introduction to Gupta Numismatics*, Jodhpur, 1994.
6. Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 115-21.
7. For the view that the Gupta gold coins also depict small narratives, see Agrawal, Ashvini, 'Narrative in the Gupta Numismatic Art', in *Ratna-Chandrikā*, ed. by Devendra Handa and Ashvini Agrawal, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 159-65.

coins of Hermaios and Kalliope. Even if we knew nothing about the specific circumstances of Chandragupta's marriage with the Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī, we could still very well appreciate their delicate intimacy arising from their refined lives which these coins seek to portray. An art of such refinement, with no transitional stages from previous examples, springing up all of a sudden, without any foreign influence, indicates artist's genius for expression. Being the very first, this type shows the decided preference of the artist for originality.

Here some remarks on the artistic merits/features of other Gupta gold coin types may be made. The obverse of the Standard type of Samudragupta shows that the Kushāṇa dress was still popular in the Gupta royal family while its reverse successfully brings out the Indianness of the goddess. Here the transparent quality of the material of the *sāṛī* of the goddess is also noteworthy. The folds of the *sāṛī* are plainly visible on these coins. Great care was evidently taken by the die-engravers to depict every minor detail on these coins. Creases or wrinkles on the light *chūṛidār* trousers worn by kings have been represented with the help of deep ridges. The Vīṇā-player type of Samudragupta, which is one of the finest specimens of Gupta numismatic art, even represents the depression made by the *vīṇā* end on the cushioned back of the couch. The fine quality of the *dhotī* worn by the king has been brought out by showing the *dhotī* as sticking to the legs. The jewelleries appearing on the person of the ladies are few and graceful and they do not shroud them as in later art. Certain coins, especially those of the Vīṇā-player type are thin, broad and well-struck and are in singularly low relief.

The Archer type coins were issued by all Gupta monarchs with the exception of Chandragupta I. In view of its great effectiveness, antiquity and association with the heroic age, the bow was a favourite weapon; and the sensitive Gupta artists have in this type brought out its archaic atmosphere in contrast with its utilitarian character in the hunting series of coins. The kings' figures are accordingly largely formalized.

The Standard type, Kācha coins, and Battle-axe and Chhatra types

are basically similar, the first two more closely. The introduction of a second figure in the third and fourth and greater freedom of pose in the latter are the only points of difference. The Standard type and the Kācha coins are formal and stylized while the Battle-axe type presents a transitional stage to the Chhatra type.

In the Couch type of Chandragupta II, the king leaning on his left arm is resting. The posture is most unassuming, and it is astonishing that he allowed himself to be depicted in so informal a manner. As argued by us elsewhere probably by that time the martial atmosphere of the age of Samudragupta had given way to the ease-loving psychology produced by prosperity and affluence.[1]

The Kārttikeya or Peacock type of Kumāragupta I clearly demonstrates his religious conviction. However, here Kārttikeya is not depicted as six-headed, as required by religious iconography. The king, shown standing or walking, possesses splendid physique and a distinctive individuality. On the reverse, Kārttikeya's dignity as a god is fully established by his imposing attitude.

The Elephant-rider type has nothing particular to indicate, though the very natural depiction of the animal is noteworthy. It is somewhat reminiscent of mural paintings.

Different from the bolt-upright rigid attitude of military men, in the Swordsman type the king wears his sword with ease and an air of distinction.

The Vīṇā-player type of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I is erroneously called the Lyrist type, because the *vīṇā*, which is the instrument represented, is confused with the lyre, or lute, or guitar, all these three being entirely different. The *vīṇā* Samudragupta is playing is of the old type. ''We have a very large number of representations'', Coomaraswamy points out, ''ranging backwards from the late Gupta period to the beginning of the second century B.C. (Bhaja and Bharhut) in which the *vīṇā* is consistently depicted as a kind of harp. It is obviously

1. Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 250-52.

with reference to this harp-vīṇā that the word as it occurs in classical Sanskrit and in Pali and early Prakrit literature is used. We may safely assume that the same harp-vīṇā is referred to in the still earlier Vedic literature; partly because of the *a priori* probability of a continuity of the tradition backward, partly because harps of various kinds actually existed in very early times and also because the Āraṇyaka sources give us the same terms and imply the same forms as those later current. It is true that in some places various kinds of vīṇā are mentioned; but aside from this fact the descriptions and actual representations are so consistent and so much in agreement that we are justified in speaking of the harp-vīṇā here described as the old Indian vīṇā: This old Indian vīṇā is a harp without a post; it has a hollow belly covered with a board or stretched leather; this belly is broad towards the back, where its end is rounded, and tapers towards the front.''[1] According to Mukund Lath, however, the coins in question depict the emperor as a singer, not a vīṇā-player only and that the purpose of the vīṇā shown on the coin is to act as an accompaniment to the vocal melody.[2]

The Vīṇā-player coins of Samudragupta are in two varieties : fine broad pieces, and thicker smaller ones, the former being decidedly artistically superior. Earlier only Samudragupta was known to have issued such coins but later some issued by Kumāragupta I were also found. The type discloses the finer side of the character of the monarchs. The sheer artistry of the type arises intrinsically from the theme. The skilful modelling, expressiveness and chaste ornamentation give a dignity to the composition and place the coins amongst the finest examples of numismatic art.

The so-called Lakshmī type of Skandagupta is so described because the lady in front of the king holds a lotus flower, an attribute of goddess

1. Coomaraswamy, 'The Parts of a Vīṇā', in *JAOS*, Vol. 50, pp. 244-45.

2. Lath, Mukund, 'Some Reflections on the Vīṇā in Gupta Coinage', in *Reappraising Gupta History for S.R. Goyal*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 238 ff.; also *JNSI*, XXXIX, pp. 114-23.

Lakshmī. But standing with his arm akimbo, the king does not seem to be very reverent, and Lakshmī too seems not quite behaving like a goddess. The absence of decorum between the king and the lady is evident. The coins seem to display a relation appropriate between a man and woman, not between man and a goddess. Further, there is the fact that Lakshmī appears on the reverse also which makes her appearance on the obverse rather illogical. Vincent Smith, therefore, identified the lady as the queen while some others have suggested that she is the queen-mother.[1]

The deities (like Durgā on lion, Chakrapurusha, Śrī or goddess of prosperity or good fortune, Kārttikeya, Gaṅgā and others), who appear on Gupta coins, are also represented in sculpture of the Gupta age. Though the Guptas permitted different faiths to flourish in their domain, they were selective in choosing the deities to be represented on their coins. Significantly only the river Gaṅgā (and not Yamunā) is deified on their coins, perhaps because it was the most important river of the Gupta empire. Similarly the goddess Lakshmī or Śrī appearing on the Gupta coins might have been looked upon also as the goddess of the prosperity of the kingdom (Rājyaśrī or Rājyalakshmī).[2]

The coin-types illustrating the valour, skill and achievements of the kings are accompanied by well-composed legends, mostly metrical, alluding to their qualifications and achievements. Inscriptional references to royal skill and achievements sometimes are supported by coin-types. For example, the Battle-axe type of Samudragupta mentions his victory in a hundred battles, a claim made for him in the Prayāga *praśasti* as well, his title *Kṛtāntaparaśu* given to him in the Prayāga *praśasti* is illustrated in his Battle-axe type coins while his Vīṇā-player type translates into visual art the subject-matter of another part of the *praśasti*

1. For various views on the subject, cf. Goyal, S.R., *An Introduction to Gupta Numismatics*, Jodhpur, 1994, pp. 80-81.

2. Cf. the Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta which says that he became emperor as he was selected (as husband) by Lakshmī herself after discarding all other sons of the King.

referring to the musical accomplishments of the king.

The hunting coins disclose that the early Imperial Guptas were not ease-loving pleasure-seekers but preferred an energetic life. They were not afraid to expose themselves to danger. Their attitudes and movements are natural and graceful. Even in trampling on a lion there is no self-consciousness. In Tiger-slayer types Samudragupta is shown left-handed, the others as ambidextrous. But as he is right-handed in his other types, it is reasonable to infer that the kings were not ambidextrous, but that the coin-designers permitted themselves an artistic licence in order to exhibit certain postural peculiarities and create diverse designs.

The straight, easy and self-confident attitude of the royal riders evidences their masterly horsemanship. No stirrups or whips were used, at least none is discernible. The horse was controlled only with the bit and bridle; a fact noticed earlier by Megasthenes.[1]

A few of the inscriptional legends connect or compare the Gupta rulers with gods and even deify them. The obverse legend on the Couch type coins of Chandragupta II refers to him as *deva*. The legend *Chakravikramaḥ* on the reverse of the coins of the Chakravikrama type of Chandragupta II (showing him as receiving certain objects from Chakrapurusha) may mean that the king's valour was like that of Chakrapurusha or that he received his sovereignty, or powers (*śaktis*) or valour from the latter. In the obverse and also reverse legends on the Kārttikeya type coins, displaying Kumāragupta I feeding a peacock on one side and Kārttikeya (also called Kumāra) riding a peacock on the other, refer to the sovereign as *Mahendrakumāra*. In the inscription on a variety of Lion-slayer type coins the same king is imagined as Narasiṁha, an incarnation of Vishṇu. Kumāragupta I's Apratigha type coins, showing

1. *Indica* fragments, Mc Crindle's trans., p. 89. It is generally believed that stirrups were unknown in India before the Indians came into contact with the Muslim invaders. But in his *Harshacharita* Bāṇa refers to stirrups used by a female rider. We feel, therefore, that though stirrups were known in ancient India, these were not used by male riders which must have rendered the Indian horsemen rather inferior in comparison to the stirrup-using horsemen of other countries.

him in the garb of a Buddhist monk and referring to him as *apratigha* (invincible) suggest that in his last years he desired to renounce the world,[1] or that he was as invincible as the Buddha.

In their attempts to stress the divine nature of the Gupta kingship the mint-masters concerned were really reflecting an idea well-known to literature[2] and epigraphs. In the Prayāga *praśasti* Harisheṇa describes Samudragupta as ''God dwelling on earth'' (*lokadhāmadevaḥ*) and alludes to his being an *avatāra* (of Vishṇu) for the protection of the righteous and destruction of the wicked, almost in the language of the *Gītā*.[3]

Reverse types of the Gupta gold coins are more important from the point of view of the depiction of the deities and hence from the point of view of their iconography. The throned goddesses are conventional in style. Though largely formal, the figures are not unattractive. The design is usually harmonious. Lakshmī seated on the lotus is in conformity with the religious iconography. The posture is fixed and ritualistic, but not without feminine grace.

The goddesses seated on the lions repeat the throned figures. Some of the postures are unusual and charming. Those seated on wicker chairs (*mūḍhā*) as in the Vīṇā type again repeat the throned figures, the position being sideways. The seated ones in the Horse-rider type, however, make a departure by emerging into the freedom of natural action. Seemingly the same, there are gradations in action and differences of mood. Some of the goddesses are slim and dainty, some full-bodied, some voluptuous, but all are lively and graceful. Of the standing female figures, that on the Kācha coins is derived from the throned figures, as those in Kumāragupta I's Tiger-hunter type are from the figures in his Horse-rider type, and the front-view ones in the Chhatra type from the lotus-seated Lakshmī. The other figures in the Chhatra type, alongwith that in

1. Goyal, S.R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 292-93.
2. *Manusmṛti*, VII. 8; *Mahābhārata*, Śāntiparvan, 59, 128-35.
3. Cf. Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, p. 42.

Samudragupta's Tiger-slayer type and that on the Aśvamedha coins, comprise a distinct class. Many of the female figures reflect the classical idea of feminine beauty.[1] The standing Gaṅgā on Tiger-slayer type coins of Samudragupta may be compared with that of the divine figure in a sculpture from Besnagar (c.500 A.D.). There is a striking similarity between the representation of Gaṅgā on the Rhinoceros-slayer type coins of Kumāragupta I with an attendant holding a parasol over her head and that of the same goddess on a door jamb found at Buxar in Bihar.[2]

Artistic Depiction of Animals

The figures of animal on Gupta coins have life-like appearance with facial contours defining their volume. Here the Gupta die-engravers often surpass their Indo-Greek counterparts. The animals depicted by them usually exhibit their characteristic qualities. Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I are shown as horse-riders. The horses on the Aśvamedha type coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I display various movements of the horse, the most common being the one in which the animal's right or left foreleg is lifted and contracted. The horses on the earlier coins of Hippostratus, Azes and Gondopharnes are disproportioned and wooden; those on the coins of Eucratides though in action, do not impress. Gupta horses, on the other hand, are full of animation and possess distinctive grace and style. With heads plumed, manes braided and bodies richly caparisoned, the comely and elegant Gupta horses with their accomplished riders, are harmoniously depicted within the legends encircling them. The Aśvamedha horses stand unadorned and in isolation beneath and in front of the sacrificial banner and post with the commanding majesty of a lion. Alongwith the Lion- and Tiger-slayer types the Horse series may be included among the most striking Gupta coinage.

In actual life the beasts are rarely at such close quarters as shown in the coins. Juxtaposition, however, not only makes the decorative

1. Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, p. 1416.
2. *Ibid.*

element coherent but stresses the relativity of the action between the hunter and the hunted. Indian art is both conventional and realistic according to need. The primary interest here is the action, and this is presented vividly, so that we get the essence; it is symbolical, for none can tread on a wounded lion without being fatally mauled. The kings' valour is sought to be made manifest by their shooting lions and tigers with bows and arrows, on foot and within range of the animals, in comparison to shooting them with modern weapons from a safe distance.

Other animals shown on the Gupta coins also exhibit their characteristic qualities. The lion, which exhibits its power to struggle on the Lion-slayer type coins, appears majestically as the mount of a goddess on numerous other pieces. The elephant and rhinoceros on a number of coins exude strength. Their representations are admirably realistic. The figure of the rhinoceros on the coins of Kumāragupta I is expressive and the fury on the animal's face upon being attacked by the king has been remarkably represented. The depiction of the rhino on these coins is at once terse and vivid. Even the circular spots on the body of the animal have been faithfully depicted. The tiger on the Tiger-slayer type coins appears to be ferocious. On the other hand, the peacock on the Kārttikeya type coins has a charming appearance. It appears with god Kārttikeya in Gupta sculpture also.

Not only lion, peacock and *makara* but also mounts of some other deities appear on Gupta coins. Garuḍa, the mount of Vishṇu, can be seen on a large number of varieties of Gupta coins as well as seals.[1]

Decline of the Gupta Numismatic Art

With the reign of Kumāragupta I the artistic quality of the Gupta coins declined. Certain types of this king are conspicuous because of their

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1. Mukherjee, Chhanda, 'Garuḍa on Coins and Seals of the Imperial Guptas', *JNSI*, XLVI, pp. 96-97. For a detailed study of Garuḍa device found on Gupta gold coins see *Gupta Gold Coins with a Garuḍa-Banner*, by Ellen M. Raven (Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 1994). Also see Goyal, Shankar, *Ancient Indian Numismatics : A Historiographical Study*, Jodhpur, 1998, pp. 170-72.

crudeness. Artistically the Aśvamedha type of Kumāragupta I is much inferior to that of his grandfather. The *yūpa* is crude and unfinished and the figure of the queen on the reverse is stumpy, bent and fat. The lotus depicted on the reverse of the Apratigha type has been crudely represented by four thick dots. The effort to achieve artistic excellence seems to be half-hearted. The figure of the goddess on the reverse of the Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer type is also erratic in treatment. Her torso is graceful but her legs are clumsy. This latter trait divests the representation of the charm it could easily have, and makes the goddess look gawky. On the obverse of the same type the figure of the attendant holding a parasol has been very poorly executed.

The varieties of the Gupta coins decreased from the reign of Skandagupta. Gold coins of his successors were issued, excepting those of Prakāśāditya, only in the Archer type with a seated goddess on the reverse. Both the devices, particularly the latter, influenced the coin types of the later periods.[1] But they are not of much value from the point of view of numismatic art.

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1. Goyal, S.R., *An Introduction to Gupta Numismatics*, Ch. 4.

Chapter Nine

The Impact of the Gupta Art on the Art of Central India and the Deccan

Art of Madhya Pradesh in the Gupta Age

The Gupta-Vākāṭaka age marks a glorious chapter in the art history of India. The political and economic stability of the period provided a sound basis for the development of literature and art during the reign of the mighty Gupta emperors. Insofar as the evolution of plastic art is concerned, traditions had already been evolved in the Central and Northern India. Bharhut, Sāñchī, Bodhgayā, Pawaya, Mathurā and Gandhāra were the chief centres where sculptural art in variegated forms had developed in the pre-Gupta age. Kaliṅga, Veṅgī region and the Deccan had also made their contribution to the development of art.

During the Gupta age iconographic features of various deities were established. But it may be pointed out that in this period aesthetic excellence had the upper hand over the iconic details. Secular subjects were also taken up by the artists, to whom art was an ennobling medium to realise the beauty of the mundane world and the spiritual happiness of the other world. Religion, to the Gupta sculptors and painters, was a thing of joy in life and beyond. To this end the artists worked and produced some of the most remarkable pieces of art. The fusion of beauty with grace reached a high watermark during this age.

Rasadṛshṭi (correct concept of sentiment or emotion) was another significant feature of the Gupta art. The supremacy of sentiments was now recognized in the art objects, whether they were animate or

inanimate. Another interesting innovation in the Gupta art was the use of decorative motifs which endowed art with a remarkable charm and dignity.

A striking feature of the Gupta art is noticed in the life-size images of the Buddha, Vishṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, and other major deities. The idea of *Chakravartin* had grown during the Gupta age. This is borne out by the contemporary literary, epigraphical and numismatic evidences. The emperors of the period assumed grandiloquent titles to emphasize unlimited power at their command. The idea of indicating all pervasiveness found its expression in the images of important deities of this age. This feature was developed in the post-Gupta period.

A study of the Gupta art motifs in this respect would be found interesting. The Gaṅgā-Yamunā motif may be taken up as an example. The region of *antarvedī*, watered by the two holy rivers, came to be regarded as the land *par excellence* in the Gupta age. The two rivers standing on their *vāhanas* were now represented on the door-jambs of the Gupta temples, holding *pūrṇaghaṭas* in their hands. This symbology continued in the medieval period almost throughout the country.

The Gupta art of the Northern and Central India had deep impact on the art of other regions, particularly Eastern India, Deccan and the South. Some of the traits became popular in South-East Asian countries also.

Vaishṇava Religion and Art in the Classical Age

During the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age the Vaishṇava pantheon developed rapidly. It was mainly due to the adherence to Vaishṇavism of the Imperial Guptas. The Gupta rulers took pride in calling themselves *Paramabhāgavatas*. They adopted the Vaishṇava Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Vishṇu, as their royal insignia. On their coins and seals garuḍa is frequently portrayed. The bird is shown surmounting the royal standard on the Gupta gold coins. On the copper and silver coins of several Gupta rulers, Garuḍa is shown in the bird form. Rāmagupta, the elder brother of Chandragupta II, issued a large number of copper coins with Garuḍa

prominently shown on them. This device was continued by other rulers of the dynasty.

The present author has examined over two thousand copper coins of Rāmagupta mostly found at Vidiśā and Eran in M.P. On a good number of them Garuḍa is shown in human form. In some cases Garuḍa is shown as a three-headed deity. This indicates that by the end of the fourth century A.D. Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Vishṇu, was elevated to the status of a deity.

Central India witnessed a remarkable change in the socio-religious and aesthetic fields during the rule of the Gupta emperors. Deogarh in the Lalitpur district of U.P. became a centre of Vaishṇavism in the time of Chandragupta II. The Daśāvatāra temple of Vishṇu at Deogarh occupies an enviable position in regard to the fusion of iconography and aesthetic spirit. The Vaishṇava panels of the temple depicting Gajoddhāra, Nara-Nārāyaṇa and others, bear an eloquent testimony to a high artistic achievement. The doorway of the Deogarh temple with the figures of Gaṅgā and a considerable number of stone figures representing the scenes from the life of Rāma and Kṛshṇa, and the images of Vishṇu, furnish valuable material for the study of Vaishṇava art of the Gupta period.

Vidiśā region in Central India occupies a place of pride in Indian art, similar to that of Mathurā in the North in several respects. It became a centre of the composite Indian culture where the Vedic-Paurāṇika religion, Buddhism and Jainism found a congenial atmosphere for their growth for quite a long period. The Brāhmaṇical faith developed at Vidiśā in its various forms. Of them, Vaishṇavism carved out a prominent place for itself from the time of Chandragupta Vikramāditya. The sculptural art of the Udaigiri caves and of several other sites in and around Vidiśā is a pointer to the growth of Vaishṇava art in Central India. Along with Vaishṇavism the Buddhist and Jaina pantheons also received due encouragement in this region. The discovery of three inscribed Tīrthaṅkara images, carved out during the time of Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta, may be mentioned in this connection. The other important

Gupta art centres in Central India were Deogarh, Pawaya and Nachna. At all these centres Vaishṇavism made a mark in the field of plastic art.

The bountiful nature of Central India greatly inspired the artists, who were masters in the depiction of human life in its multifarious forms. When we compare the contemporary art of the Gaṅga valley with the art that developed in Central Indian, we notice the significant part played by nature in the latter region, not so conspicuous in the land to the north of the Vindhyas. This is noticed not only in the suppleness of the human form, but also in the expression of different sentiments. The art relics discovered at Pawaya, Deogarh, Tumain, Bhumarā, Vidiśā, Eran, Nachna and Tigwa amply prove the statement. The stone panels from Nachna representing scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and those from Eran, portraying the life of Kṛshṇa, are remarkable for their exquisite modelling and expression. The cult images of Rāma seem to have been carved in the 5th century A.D. in Central India. Nachna in the Panna district seems to have been the site where the earliest temple of Rāma was constructed. The indigenous elements of the Chambal and Betwa valleys undoubtedly endowed the plastic art of this region with elasticity and grace, which has a distinct charm of its own in the entire range of Indian classical art.

The sculptural material of the early medieval period, known from several parts of Central India, tends to indicate that the Vaishṇava and Śaiva cults were more popular than other Brāhmaṇical cults. Among the various forms of Vishṇu, the Varāha incarnation became quite popular, particularly in its composite human-animal form. The Nṛsiṁha or Man-lion incarnation also deserves special mention. The Gupta images of Nṛsiṁha in composite form are known from Udaigiri, Pawaya, Eran and Tigwa. At Eran three shrines, one each of Vishṇu, Varāha and Nṛsiṁha, have been discovered. In the early medieval period the popularity of these two incarnations increased.

In the early medieval period (c. 650-1200 A.D.) Vaishṇavism continued to flourish in Central India. The Gupta aesthetic norms are discernible in the later art to some extent. Now more attention was paid

to iconographic details and ornamentation in art. In the Vindhyā and Chhattisgarh regions of Central India several temples of Vishṇu were constructed during this period.

Several Vishṇu images and those of his incarnations, particularly of Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, Rāma and Kṛshṇa, have been found at sites such as Ramgarh (Rāmagiri of Kālidāsa), Khajuraho, Vidiśā, Badoh-Pathari, Kadwaha, Kharod, Sirpur, Malhar, Shabarinarayana and Janjgir in Madhya Pradesh. Some of the Vishṇu images found at these sites show him in the all-pervasive form. His syncretistic images with Śiva are of special interest. Similarly, the *sarvatobhadra* images showing Vishṇu with other important Hindu deities are also worth mentioning. The Rāmāyaṇa and Kṛshṇāyana scenes are known from several of the above mentioned and other sites. It indicates to the greater popularity of Rāma and Kṛshṇa than other incarnations of Vishṇu in Central India.

Ornamental Aspects of the Art of the Gupta Age

During the Gupta period unsurpasssed excellence was achieved in fabric and composition of the obverse and reverse of the coins, particularly in those of gold. Human and other figures and the ornamental devices on these coins show anatomical perferction, grace and beauty.[1] As in the literature of the period, so also in the art-devices including coinage, one can see the ideals of beauty and tranquility. The figures of kings and queens and male and female deities and various other details have been delineated tastefully on the Gupta coins. On one of the types of the coins of Kumāragupta I, Lakshmī, the goddess of beauty and wealth, is shown feeding the peacock or scattering coins. The scene is an eloquent testimony to the happy life of the times. A large number of decorative patterns on the coins and seals of the Gupta period furnish valuable material for art history. The word *rūpakṛti*, written on the Couch type gold coin of Chandragupta II, is significant in the context of artistic creativity.

1. Cf. Ch. 8. (Ed.).

In regard to the ornamentation, the seals and sealings of the Gupta period indicate some originality and decorative superiority akin to the contemporary art objects of other categories. This is clearly seen on the specimens known from Sunet, Mathurā, Eran, Rajghat and several other sites. From Sunet near Ludhiana two circular sealings have been found representing the *dohada* scene, wherein a young damsel is holding the branch of a tree and is in the posture of striking its trunk with her left foot. The tree is in full bloom. The lady stands in *tribhaṅga* pose, encircling the branch of the tree with her left hand. Her dangling down right hand is feeding a bird, which stands near her left foot below. The tree seems to be red aśoka (*raktāśoka*), the blossoming of which, according to the Indian poetic convention, takes place when it is struck by a young damsel.

Blossoming trees are also seen on sealings found from Mathurā, Kauśāmbī, Basarh and other sites. On the well known sealing from Kumarhar, mentioning *arogya-vihāra* (hospital of a monastery) a flowering tree is worth noticing.

Beautiful decorative designs of Gajalakshmī, *makara*, dancing peacock, *meru* and *maṅgala-ghaṭa* are noticed on several sealings from Rajghat near Varanasi. The figures of Lakshmī, the bestower of wealth, may be seen on the sealings from Basarh, Bhita, Ahichchhatrā and Nālandā. On some of these may be seen fine representations of *maṅgala-ghaṭa, śaṁkha* and other objects. The standing figure of Lakshmī on an inscribed Gupta sealing from Eran is remarkable for the delicate delineation of her bodily form.

Art Under the Vākāṭaka Dynasty

The Vākāṭaka dynasty occupies a significant place, both in the political and cultural history of India. Almost contemporaneous with the imperial Guptas, the Vākāṭakas ruled over an extensive region south of the river Narmadā. Their hegemony was spread over large parts of the Deccan, Vidarbha and the major parts of South Kosala.

The Vākāṭaka dynasty made appreciable contribution to the plastic

and pictorial art. The extant relics of their period in the coastal Deccan, Vidarbha and the contiguous regions of the present Madhya Pradesh bear eloquent testimony to this. From the western coast to the Chhattisgarh area, a good number of sculptures assignable to a period between the 4th and the 6th centuries A.D. are known. Several of these bear a close similarity to the classical Gupta art which developed to the north of the river Narmadā. In some cases the Vākāṭaka sculptural art represents interesting iconographic innovations, not noticeable in the Gupta sculptural tradition.

The pictorial art of Ajanta developed during the reign of the Vākāṭakas considerably. An eloquent testimony to the all-round progress of art is furnished by the Ajanta caves.

A comparative study of the plastic remains found at sites like Mandhal, Paunar, Pauni, Hamalpuri, Nandpuri and Ajanta with those from Vidiśā-Udaigiri, Nachna and Bhumarā in the north, indicates several common traits in regard to themes, composition, aesthetic spirit and iconographic norms. Various original ideas and regional distinctions are also discernible in the Vākāṭaka reliefs and icons. The extent of this art and its sumptuous and regional nature create adequate interest for its study.

The Paurāṇika references to the Vākāṭakas associate them with the Vindhya region in the early stage of their history. From their original home they migrated to the south of the Narmadā, where they emerged as a power to reckon with. Gradually they extended their hegemony in the extensive areas of the Deccan and South Kosala.

The Vākāṭakas were followers of the Vedic religion. Vaishṇavism and Śaivism also flourished side by side in their kingdom. They adopted Sanskrit as their court language. At the same time, the influence of Prakrit was also quite considerable. This was but natural due to the earlier prominent position of Prakrit in the Deccan, particularly during the Sātavāhana rule.

The study of the Vākāṭaka art requires an appraisal of the

geographical situation and the inter-connection of the Deccan-Vidarbha region with other parts of the country. There were four main routes passing through the land of the Vākāṭakas. These were :

1. *The northern main route from Mathurā to Ter* (passing through Kāntipurī, Padmāvatī, Vidiśā, Ajanta, Paithan and Nevasa). From Ter it went, via Koṇḍapur, to Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa and Amarāvatī.

2. *The north-eastern route from Kauśāmbī to Ramtek* (via Bharhut, Nachna, Eran and Tripurī).

3. *From Ramtek, via Pauni, to Pañchavaṭī* (on the confluence of the rivers Godāvarī and Indrāvatī).

4. *From Kanheri to Pauni* (via Nasik, Ajanta and Paunar).

These routes helped in the transmission of various traits of culture and inter-relations between the North and South in the fields of religion, language, literature and fine arts. Here it may also be mentioned that the impact of cultural elements was not always from the North to South. It was also *vice-versa*, particularly in the field of religion and iconography.

Several Vākāṭaka inscriptions furnish references to *mārgas* (routes). Names of important towns and villages are also found in inscriptions. Some of the *mārgas* were: *Uttaramārga, Śailapura mārga, Padmapura-Pūrvamārga* and *Aparamārga, Kauśika-mārga, Yaśapura mārga*, etc. The Vākāṭaka capitals — Padmapura, Nandivardhana and Pravarapura—are also mentioned in a number of epigraphs.

The long Vākāṭaka rule in the extensive regions of the Deccan, Vidarbha and South Kosala remained almost undisturbed. This was mainly due to the cordial relations which the Vākāṭakas maintained with their contemporary powers—the Guptas, the Nāgas, the Kadambas, etc. This peaceful atmosphere led to an unhampered growth of literature and fine arts. The patronage received from the ruling king, the guilds of merchants and the monastic establishments gave an impetus to the development of architecture and art in the form of stūpas, vihāras, temples, sculptures and paintings.

Stone, wood and ivory were the chief media of plastic art during

this period. At Tagara and Vidiśā the ivory art was considerably developed. From Vidiśā the ivory art reached Begram in Afghanistan, where a large number of ivory figures, showing exquisite artistic forms, have been discovered.

The northern art-traditions of Mathurā-Vidiśā-Nachna freely joined the art of the Western Deccan—Kanheri- Nāsik and Bhaja—and those of the Veṅgī region of the South-East. This inter-relation blossomed into glorious art forms in the area of the Vākāṭakas. There the Vaishṇava (Sātvata) and Śaiva faiths joyously mingled with the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism. The broad-based religious toleration and assimilation is eloquently borne out in the Vākāṭaka art. Not only the numerous art relics but also the contemporary inscriptional and literary evidences confirm this.

From the point of view of chronological sequence, the Vākāṭaka sculptural art may be put under the following three broad categories:

I. The Early Phase—It is represented by the art centres of Mandhal, Pauni, Patur, Hamalpuri and Ramtek.

II. The Developed Phase—This is seen in the art of Nagardhan, Hamalpuri, Nandpuri, Paunar, Padmi and a few other sites.

III. The Art of Ajanta—It can be placed under various heads, which are discussed in some detail below.

As regards the art centres under I and II categories, it may be mentioned that both from the point of view of aesthetic excellence and iconographic forms, some of the relics rank considerably high.

Mandhal, 75 km. south-east of Nagpur, was an important Vākāṭaka site. The field work conducted there has yielded several stone sculptures, representing Śiva, Vishṇu, Devī and other deities. Most of these have been recovered from a mound called Bhol Huḍkī.

A rare image of twelve-headed Śiva has been found at Mandhal. I.K. Sarma has rightly called it Dvādaśa-śīrshaka Śiva. Eight of the heads are shown on the top and the remaining four are on the arms and thighs. The symbols of *ghaṭa* and *asi* are also seen in the image. Some faces have

moustaches, while a few of them have feminine grace. Both the eyes of each face are fully open, the third eye is conspicuous by its absence on the foreheads. On stylistic grounds the sculpture may be assigned to the late 4th century A.D. I.K. Sarma has traced the origin of the multifaced images of Śiva with reference to the earliest five-faced Śivaliṅga from Bhita near Kauśāmbī.[1]

An eight-headed stone image of Śiva was obtained from the bed of the river Shivana at Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh. The image is carved in the round. Four of the heads are shown in a line a little below the top of the Śivaliṅga. The remaining four heads are carved below in the second line. The faces have wide open eyes. The third eye is also clearly seen on the foreheads. The heads have elaborate *jaṭājūṭa* and wear necklaces, earlobes and other ornaments. This rare Śiva image may be assigned to the early 6th cent. A.D.[2]

According to I.K. Sarma, the Mandhal image represents the erotic aspect of Śiva. In his work on early Śaiva art[3] he has discussed in detail various forms of Śiva, giving apt literary and archaeological evidences. I, however, do not think that the unique twelve-faced image from Mandhal shows the erotic form of Śiva. The image does not show any trace of the Vedic tradition nor can it be called the Sadāśiva or Mahāsadāśiva aspect of Śiva. I think that the sculpture in question represents the *vibhava* aspect of Śiva. Like the Sātvata cult, Śaivism was also deeply influenced by the upsurge of *bhakti*. The discovery in the Vidarbha region of this Śiva image along with several other early Brāhmaṇical images, is remarkable indeed.

Several icons from Mandhal, Patur and Ramtek show excellent modelling and interesting devices. An image of Durgā of the early fifth century A.D. from Mandhal is shown wearing a garland of round coins.

1. State Museum, Lucknow, No. H-4. See Banerji, R.D., *ASI, AR*, 1909-10, p. 148, Pl. LIV.

2. Bajpai, K.D., *Madhya Pradesh kā Purātattva*, Bhopal, 1970, Pl. XIV.

3. Sarma, I.K., *The Development of Early Śaiva Art and Architecture*, New Delhi, 1982.

Ramtek and the area around it has furnished valuable material for the study of architecture and sculpture. This region was the centre of Śaiva and Vaishṇava religions. Several brick temples were constructed at Ramtek and Mansar (Dist. Nagpur, 5 km. west of Ramtek) during the 5th-6th centuries A.D. These temples were of Vishṇu, Trivikrama, Rudra, Narasiṁha, Kevala-narasiṁha and of a few other deities.

From the site of Mansar a rare stone image of Śiva has been obtained. It represents god Rudra in an interesting form. The pot-bellied deity is shown seated in *sukhāsana*, wearing a heavy pearl necklace (*upavīta*) with 27 strings. The belly is tied with a thick scarf, similar to the one found in the Mathurā image of Kubera (C-2 of the Mathurā Museum). It is wrong to suppose that the image represents Baṭuka Bhairava or Jambhala. He is shown here in the form of Rājarāja Śiva, the overlord of Kubera. The plasticity of the image showing a beautiful synthesis of the Mathurā and the Veṅgī art-styles is remarkable. The figure may be assigned to the early fifth century A.D.

A newly discovered Gupta stone inscription from Ramtek is of unusual importance. It is written in Brāhmī and refers to the construction of a Vishṇu temple (called Prabhāvatīsvāmī) and a tank named Sudarśanataḍāga. The Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatīguptā seems to have got this temple constructed at the religious centre of Ramtek. The names of Chandragupta and Ghaṭotkacha have also been deciphered in this record. The stone sculptures found at Ramtek indicate an advanced classical style of the 5th-6th centuries A.D. The *gaṇa* figures on the door jambs found there show a similarity with those found at Nachna and Bhumarā in Central India. Likewise an image of Narasiṁha is akin to the statue of that deity at Tigwa (in Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh).

The site of Paunar has been identified with Pravarapura, once the capital town of the Vākāṭakas. Many interesting stone sculptures have been discovered there. Mention may be made of an image of Sūrya seated on chariot, of Śeshaśāyī Vishṇu and the exquisite figure of the river goddess Gaṅgā on *makara*. Several scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the

Bhāgavata P. are portayed there, such as the lamentation of Daśaratha, meeting of Rāma with Bharata and the killing of Dhenuka, Pralamba and Kaṁsa by Kṛshṇa. Majority of these sculptures may be assigned to the 5th-6th centuries A.D. It is very probable that during that period a popular *devakula* existed at Pravarapura. The artistic features of these images, such as the elongated legs of Gaṅgā, are clear indications that the sculptures of Paunar and other important Vākāṭaka sites had certain regional traits distinct from those of the Gupta centres in the North and Central India.

The late Vākāṭaka art of Hamalpuri, Nandpuri and Nagardhan shows some interesting features. The head of the stone image of Vishṇu from Hamalpuri has five horizontal bands, as is noticed on a head from Mathurā of the late Kushāṇa period. The seated Mother Goddess figures from Hamalpuri are reminiscent of such images from Pathari in the Vidiśā district of Madhya Pradesh. We notice that at both the sites goddesses are shown seated in the *pralamba-pādāsana*.

The plastic art of Ajanta may be divided broadly into four main categories:

i. The Buddha and Bodhisattva images.

ii. The Yakshas, Nāgas, Suparṇas, Vidyādharas, Gandharvas and other semi-divine figures.

iii. The female figures, the *mithunas, dvārapālas*, the dwarfs, attendants and other commoners.

iv. Decorative motifs, such as elephants, lions, deer, *makaras, vyālas, purṇaghaṭas* and the flora and fauna in general.

The epigraphical evidence at Ajanta throws interesting light on the artistic activities at the site in about the last quarter of the 5th century A.D. Here mention may be made of the inscription of Varāhadeva, the minister of the Vākāṭaka ruler Harisheṇa, in Cave no. 16. Verse 32 of this inscription refers to the tastefully excavated cave in the hillock which was inhabited by great personalities — *vividha-layana-sanu-ssevyamāno-mahadbhiḥ*.

It is said in verse 24 of the same inscription that the cave, constructed at the instance of Varāhadeva, was adorned with windows, spires, terraces, ledges, statues of the nymphs of Indra and the like and was supported by pillars and stairs.

A critical study of the Mahāyāna architecture at Ajanta clearly indicates the various stages of development. The early plain architectural devices were later on replaced by complicated and more decorative forms. The earlier Caves no. 15, 6, 7 and 11 at Ajanta may well be compared with Caves no. 20 and 26 in this connection.

As regards the Buddha images of Ajanta, they are usually shown seated in the *padmāsana* or the *pralamba pādāsana*. The postures or *mudrās* are normally *varada, dharmachakra-pravartana* or *abhaya*. The earlier Buddha statues, e.g. in Caves no. 11, 6 and 15, may be distinguished from those of a comparatively later date found in Caves no. 1, 19, 20, etc. The attendant figures in the latter also show developed forms, as is seen in the case of the images of Padmapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi in Cave no. 1.

It may be pointed out here that from the time of emperor Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty the ideal of *Chakravartī*, already illustrated in the well-known relief of Jagayyapetta representing king Mandhātā, gained a fillip. The literary, epigraphical and numismatic evidences of the Gupta age tend to indicate the growing popularity of the *Chakravartī* ideal. This ideal is found enunciated in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya. The grandiloquent titles of the Gupta emperors signify on all-pervasive power and glory befitting a *Chakravartī* king. The deities like Vishṇu, Śiva and the Buddha, assumed a more dignified and all-pervasive status in this age. The Buddha figure at Ajanta seated on a lion-throne in the *pralamba pādāsana*, and his epithets like *daśabalabalī* represent the omnipotent status, imbued with an unlimited power of the Buddha. The expression of the Buddha in the figure of Cave no.19 in the protection attitude, is a pointer to this advanced status of the deity.[1]

1. See *Mānasāra*, Ch. XLIX, verses 18 and 23, wherein *kirīṭamukuṭa*, attributed to god Vishṇu, is prescribed for a *sārvabhauma* or an *adhirāja* ruler.

Regarding the Bodhisattva images at Ajanta, it may be noticed that in the early stage they usually flank the Buddha figure. They are shown in rather miniature forms, and so also the other attendants. In the later depictions, Avalokiteśvara is represented independently as in the Caves no. 19 and 27.

The Nāgas, the Yakshas and other semi-divine figures are carved in several caves. The Nāgas at Ajanta seem to enjoy greater respect than others of this category. They are endowed with the power of protection. The figure of Nāgarāja, seated with his queen in Cave no 19, is by far the most significant Nāga sculpture. Another Nāgarāja is shown in Cave no. 16. Nāga figures are usually carved at the outer and inner doorways and also in the cells.

As regards the Yakshas, they are usually shown potbellied , e.g. in Cave no. 19. In Cave no.2 they are shown as *rājapurushas*. Pāñchika and Hārīti are also represented. Yakksha figures occur in Cave no. 19, 21, 23, 26 also.

Female figures, with sensitive facial expressions and in graceful poses, are seen carved in Caves no. 4,5, 16, 20, 21,26,27, etc. on door-jambs, capitals or brackets. The soft plastic treatment of these figures is remarkable. The females are usually shown standing gracefully. The *śālabhañjikās* standing under aśoka or mango trees, are also seen e.g. in Cave no.4. A female in Cave no. 19 is shown holding a *pūrṇaghaṭa*. Flying *apsarās* may also be seen in Cave no. 26. In Cave no. 27 a lady, standing on *makara* under a tree, holds a parrot in her hand. In Cave no. 26 the daughters of Māra, wearing various ornaments, are shown in attractive postures.

It may be noted that the idioms of classical Indian beauty are successfully adhered to in the portrayal of these female figures. The stout, colossal human form is now mellowed by delicacy and elegance, which may also be noted in the contemporary Central Indian art of Deogarh, Besnagar, Bhumarā and Nachna.

The representation of the *dvārapālas*, the dwarfs and attendants

of various types is also noteworthy. The conventionalised form of these and of the *mithuna* figures assume liveliness and a pleasing composition.

The decorative motifs at Ajanta are quite rich and varied in nature. They include the *pūrṇakumbha*, the *patrabhañja*, full and half lotuses, geometrical designs and figures of various animals and birds.

All these features of the Ajanta art clearly bring out the impact of the Gupta art traditions on the art of the Vākāṭaka realm.

Chapter Ten

The Vākāṭaka Caves at Ajanta and their Successors

The development of the rock-out caves of Western India falls into two great phases. The first, which attests to the dynamic spread of Buddhism into Western India, ended in the second century A.D. Then, remarkably, excavating activity almost totally ended throughout India until after the middle of the fifth century A.D. The sole excavations which can be assigned to this long hiatus of nearly three hundred years are the very small and single-chambered Hindu caves at Udayagiri in Central India, mostly dated to about 400 A.D. Thus it is evident that the excavators who undertook the first caves in the new (so-called Mahāyāna) phase of Buddhist patronage had no experience doing this type of work before. This explains the diffident and often clumsy character of their inaugural efforts, as well as their initial dependence on the earlier (Hīnayāna) rock-cut forms for determining the general format of their monuments.

Chronology of Mahāyāna Caves at Ajanta

By far the most remarkable series of caves created in this renaissance of Buddhist excavating activity in the late fifth century are those cut into the dramatically curved gorge of the Waghora River a few kilometers from the old town of Ajanta, from which the site takes its name. Lying about one hundred kilometers north-northeast of present-day Aurangabad, the site was included within the domains of the emperor Harisheṇa of the Vākāṭaka dynasty. It might well be argued that Indian classical culture reached the very highest point in its development during

the reign of this great but long-neglected king, who ruled from c.460 to c.477 A.D. Of course this cultural florescence had its origins in generations of vigorous growth under the Gupta kings of the fourth and fifth centuries; but by the early years of Harisheṇa's rule the Gupta dynasty was starting its long course of gradual disintegration. The decline was in part due to pressures from the Hephthalite Huns to the north, in part due to internal dissensions, and in part due to the aggressive expansionism of Harisheṇa himself, whose domains in central India stretched from Kaliṅga on the Bay of Bengal to the Konkan coast on the Arabian Sea. As it turned out, it was the Vākāṭaka dynasty, under the emperor Harisheṇa, that became the final great sustainer of India's Golden Age; and when the Vākāṭaka dynasty was shattered, during the reign of Harisheṇa's inept son and successor, by a disastrous insurrection of rebellious feudatories, India entered a period of political chaos from which it did not recover for nearly fifty years.[1] By that time, as we shall see, the first great *Hindu* caves were being created, and stand as witnesses to profound political changes and to a significant cultural renewal.

The urgent yet at the same time sporadic development of Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase dramatically reveals the critical historical situation in late Vākāṭaka times. Indeed, we can follow the course of events by analyzing the progress of the site's patronage during the times, from about 460 on, with which we are here concerned. Furthermore, by analyzing the development of style and iconography in a number of the inscribed caves, it can be shown that at least five of the patrons mentioned therein cooperated in the inauguration of the site early in the 460's, and yet were still involved, and anxiously trying to complete their work, when the site started into its sudden final decline just prior to 480. Assuming that all of these five patrons were relatively mature when they began their impressive undertakings at the time of the site's inauguration, and knowing that *all five* were still alive late in the site's history when the

1. See the author's 'The Vākāṭaka's Flowering and Fall', in *The Art of Ajanta : New Perspectives*, Vol. 1, edited by R. Parimoo, New Delhi, pp. 71-99.

dedicatory inscriptions that refer to them were written, our assertion that the whole Mahāyāna evolution of the site spanned not more than two decades seems particularly credible.[1]

Such "actuarial" evidence perfectly accords with other compelling evidence, which a reconsideration of Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracharita* brings to light.[2] Since it can be shown that a significant start was not made on any of the Mahāyāna caves at Ajanta prior to the inauguration of Cave 16, which was begun during Harisheṇa's reign by his own chief minister, we know that they all must have been started sometime after 458; for at that date, as we know from the Hisse-Borala inscription, Harisheṇa's father was still reigning. And since all of Ajanta's activity can be shown to fall within the regnal periods of Harisheṇa and his ill-fated successor, Sarvasena III (the last Vākāṭaka king), this activity must have ended well before 486. This is because the Barwani copper plate inscription of Mahārāja Subandhu reveals that the latter king was ruling in Mahishamatī by that date, yet the *Daśakumāracharita* makes it clear that Mahishamatī was within the domains of the Vākāṭakas up until the collapse of their dynasty. All such evidence supports the conclusion, as I have shown elsewhere, that the accession of Harisheṇa, and the final collapse of the Vākāṭaka power after the death of his successor, can reasonably be placed at about 460 and 483 respectively.[3] Within these limits, the site's inauguration and its final abandonment can be placed at about 462 and

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1. See Spink, W., 'Ajanta's Chronology : Politics and Patronage' in *Kalādarśana* AIIS Volume edited by J. Williams, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 109-26. Assuming that Harisheṇa sponsored Cave 1, the end of work on which signals the final stage of the site's consistent development, he could be considered yet another donor whose maturity comprehends essentially the whole of the site's Mahāyāna development. Also, although the local king, Upendragupta, is not heard of after c. 471, due to his defeat, it is evident that all of his own caves were made within a rather brief period, beginning after Harisheṇa's accession, and ending well before Harisheṇa died.

2. For a discussion of the evidence in the *Daśakumāracharita* see Spink, W., 'The Great Cave at Elephanta : A Study of Sources', in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. by B. Smith, Delhi, 1983, pp. 235-82.

3. Supra ref.p. 180, note 1.

480 respectively. One must, however, allow a year or two leeway in such calculations, since there are no absolute dates given in any of the inscriptions of Harisheṇa's reign.

Thus Ajanta's vigorous and consistent Mahāyāna development, which ended abruptly when Harisheṇa died in c.477, occupied a span of only about fifteen years. (See Time Chart). Even including the helterskelter production of intrusive Buddha images during Ajanta's last few anxious years, up until c.480, it is clear that the site had been totally abandoned as far as any further artistic patronage was concerned less than twenty years after work on it had begun.

Admittedly, this ''short'' chronology is still not accepted by all scholars, some of whom believe that the site's Mahāyāna development occupied two centuries or more, with the Vākāṭakas being responsible for only a few of the caves, such as Cave 16 and 17, both directly assignable to Harisheṇa's reign on inscriptional grounds. They would contend that the more ''developed''—generally more elaborate—Ajanta caves, such as Cave 2 and Cave 26, date from the sixth or even seventh century, and support such a late dating by assuming that the great cave at Elephanta, Caves 21 and 29 at Ellora, and certain caves at Aurangabad all belong to the seventh or eighth century, whereas actually these are all sixth century monuments.[1] All of this confusion began some years ago with the mistaken assumption that the so-called ''Embassy Scene'' (actually an unidentified Jātaka tale) in Ajanta Cave 1 might depict the visit of a Persian ambassador to the court of the (Hindu!) Chālukya king Pulakeśin II, an event that was known to have taken place in 625 A.D.[2] By the time this clearly incorrect identification had been proven groundless, the notion that the paintings in Cave 1 all belonged to this period about 150 years too late—had gained currency and authority. By then, of course, the even later dating of Elephanta and associated caves

1. See Spink, W., 'Ellora's Earliest Phase', in *Bulletin of the Ame.Academy of Benares*, Inaugural Issue, pp. 11-22, Figs. 21-40.

2. See Schlingloff, D., *Studies in Ajanta Paintings*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 58-63.

at Ellora and Aurangabad had also become ''conventional'', and was called forth to support the same erroneous dating of Cave 1 and other caves at Ajanta which had at first supported *it*!

The scholars who object to my so-called ''short chronology'' for Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase argue that the excavation and decoration of more than two dozen major caves could never have been accomplished in such a short time. In response to this, it could be noted first of all that *not one* of the many Mahāyāna caves was ever fully painted, and in fact considerably more than half of them were still being cut out by the excavators when work on them was abandoned. Thus the question perhaps *should* be—particularly if one recognizes that nearly all of them were started during the first five of six years of activity at the site—how could it have taken so *long* to carve them, if work went on at the site for over a decade and a half? Knowing the speed with which excavators, to say nothing of painters, can work, and being able to judge from the evidence of those caves where work stopped in midcourse that dozens of workers must have been employed on each, it is obvious that many or all of them must have suffered lengthy periods of delay at various points in their progress. (See Time Chart).

The explanation for the burst of energy with which Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase was begun, after nearly three centuries during which no such excavations were done anywhere in India, can be found in its prestigious and affluent patronage, while it must also be true that Harisheṇa's strong control over his growing empire encouraged such major public endeavors. Indeed, the evidence of the Thalner inscription of the third year of Harisheṇa's reign suggests that this region, under a feudatory ruler, had been part of Harisheṇa's inherited realm and therefore was probably strongly held from the start.[1] This fact alone would have encouraged travel and trade and would have made Ajanta an attractive destination for artists, monks, and devotees who would have heard about the new activity there from afar.

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1. For Thalner inscription, supra ref. p. 180, note 1.

.Ajanta's Mahāyāna phase began in a burst of enthusiasm. As many as ten or twelve caves were begun during the first two or three years of inaugural activity; and what is particularly significant is the type of patronage involved. Judging from the extant inscriptions, these founders were a very powerful group indeed, all connected in one way or another to important courts. The main motive power may have come from the local feudatory king himself—Upendragupta of Ṛshika—whose inscription in Cave 17 explains that after the sudden death of his younger brother, having the ''consciousness of transience'' vividly in mind, he ''made the great tree of religious merit grow''.[1] This rich and pious ruler donated an impressive complex of four caves (17-20) at the very center of the site. His beautiful chaitya hall, Cave 19, carefully oriented to the position of the rising sun at the winter solstice, was certainly planned as the new devotional centre for the site.[2] Although its basic shape proves its dependence on Cave 9, one of the two old Hīnayāna chaitya halls at the site, its elaborate facade and interior decoration reflect the lavishly ornate style of the day, with which the architects and artists at the site would have been familiar from previous work on palaces and temples.

Upendragupta also donated a large and beautifully painted vihāra for use as a residence for well over thirty monks who, two to a cell, once occupied the small chambers cut in the side and rear walls around the cave's pillared interior. But now, in the Mahāyāna phase, the vihāra functions as more than a mere residence. Beginning in c.466, a shrine, with a seated Buddha image, came to be invariably added at the center of the rear wall.

Varāhadeva, chief minister of the Vākāṭaka emperor Harisheṇa, was another prestigious early patron of the site. ''Devoted only to the Buddha,'' he proved his piety by donating the splendid vihāra, Cave 16,

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1. For the Cave 17 inscriptions see Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, Ootacamund, 1963, pp. 127-29.

2. See Spink, W., 'Ajanta's Chronology : Solstitial Evidence', *Ars Orientalis*, XV, (1985), pp. 97-117.

"adorned...with beautiful galleries and...affording enjoyment of well-known comforts in all seasons,...to the Community of Monks."[1] Besides that, he also donated a similar cave, the so-called Ghaṭotkacha vihāra, near the village of Gulwada, eleven miles away.

A third powerful patron, the monk Buddhabhadra, aided by the monk Dharmadatta and a "good pupil" named Bhadrabandhu, inaugurated the great cave complex at the western extremity of the site, at this same early date.[2] This complex centers upon a large chaitya hall (Cave 26), to which upper and lower wings were added at either side of its court. The clumsily-conceived upper wings, here called Caves 25 and 27, could well be the first Mahāyāna vihāras begun at the site, having been in course of excavation even before the full facade between them had been exposed.[3] They were abandoned while still very incomplete, however, probably because the lower wings were more "up-to-date" and convenient.

Cave 26's relatively remote location was not selected because of its being begun at a late date, when all more central locations along Ajanta's scarp had already been filled, as was long supposed. Rather, its positioning was determined by the desire to orient the great hall to the rising sun at the summer solstice, just as Cave 19 has been oriented to the sun's position at the winter solstice. The Cave 26 complex's donor, the monk Buddhabhadra, also had impressive courtly connections; in his dedicatory inscription, he claims to have been a friend to the minister of the neighouring province of Aśmaka "through many successive rebirths".[4]

With so many prestigious patrons involved in the inauguration of Mahāyāna activity at Ajanta, it is hardly surprising to find that the Vākāṭaka emperor eventually himself took an active interest in the site.

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1. For the Cave 16 inscription, supra ref. p. 184, note 1, pp. 109-11.

2. For the Cave 26 inscription, see Yazdani, G., *Ajanta*, Vol. 4, text (1955), pp. 114-18.

3. Supra ref. p. 181, note 1.

4. Supra ref. note 2 above.

''That moon among princes, Harisheṇa'', as one of the inscriptions at the site describes him, was almost certainly the patron of Cave 1, which was started some five years after Ajanta's renaissance was underway.[1] Appropriately, Cave 1 is the most impressively decorated vihāra at the site. It is probably significant too that all of its narrative paintings and carvings are insistently focussed upon the theme of ideal kingship.

Although Ajanta's development began so auspiciously, it was soon interrupted by what appears to have been an outbreak of hostilities between Upendragupta, the feudatory king of this region (ancient Ṛshika), and the rival king of the neighbouring Aśmaka, who was also a Vākāṭaka feudatory. This had a disastrous effect on work at the site, as is clear from the fact that for a short period (c.469-c.472) work continued *only* on the monuments of the local king (Upendragupta) and on the emperor Harisheṇa's Cave 1. But then, from about 472 to about 475, work at Ajanta was totally interrupted; and the cause seems clear. It would appear that Upendragupta, the king of Ṛshika, although initially secure, was now no longer able to withstand the assaults of the Aśmakas; for after what appears to have been a frenzied finishing-up of the shrine images in his vihāras, Caves 17 and 20, and a hasty concentration on completing the most essential portions of his sumptuous chaitya Cave 19, work on his caves ended completely. It is significant that, judging from the evidence of style and iconography, the related Buddhist excavations at Bagh, in the more northernly domains of the Vākāṭaka king Harisheṇa, and the caves at Dharaśiva, in his domains to the south, appear to have been begun at this very point in time. Quite possibly, apart from the Vākāṭaka's general interest in supporting Buddhism, the impetus for these new undertakings was the sudden availability of a host of experienced but unemployed artisans from the troubled Ajanta region to take up such work. Then, as the evidence also suggests, at least some of them must have returned to work at Ajanta, as well as at the

1. See Spink, W., 'Ajanta's Chronology : Cave 1's Patronage', in *Chhavi*, II, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares, 1981, pp. 144-57.

Ghaṭotkacha vihāra, and at the Aśmaka-connected Caves 1 and 3 at Aurangabad, when peace was restored a few years later.

It seems evident that, by about 475, the Aśmakas had defeated Upendragupta of Ṛshika and had assumed control of the Ajanta region. One sign of this is the fact that Upendragupta's beautiful chaitya Cave 19, which had been essentially finished when work on it broke off just before the Hiatus (472-474) was never used for worship—there is not a trace of soot from oil lamps or from incense burners on its painted surfaces. Furthermore, the residence cells in its forecourt were brashly and expediently cut away, presumably by the Aśmakas, in order to make a more convenient pathway to their own chaitya hall (Cave 26), upon which work was now vigorously proceeding once again, after having been abandoned immediately after c.468, when a flare-up of the old Aśmaka-Ṛshika antagonism had caused a drastic ''Recession'' at the site. Now that the control of the region was securely in the aggressive Aśmaka's hands, Ajanta began to flourish mightily once more. Work proceeded vigorously again on nearly all of the still-unfinished excavations, with the notable exception of those associated with the defeated Upendragupta. However, these halycon days were not to last for long, for only too soon the great Vākāṭaka overlord, Harisheṇa, died. This is suggested by the fact that his regal Cave 1, upon which work had been vigorously continued as soon as the Aśmakas had conquered and stabilized the region, was never quite fully finished and apparently neither dedicated nor used for worship, as would surely have been the case had its sponsor lived.[1]

Significantly, all consistent excavating activity at the site suddenly stopped shortly after Cave 1 was abandoned, presumably due to Harisheṇa's death, in c.477. Beginning immediately thereafter, in 478, patrons started rushing their shrine images to completion, as if time was fast running out and they had better finish these most essential elements of their caves while they still could. What the site's evidence suggests is that almost immediately after Harisheṇa's death, the new local rulers—

1. *Ibid.*

the Aśmakas—took some action which was deleterious to the continuance of work at the site; and this conclusion is directly supported by the evidence of the *Daśakumāracharita*. This illuminating account reveals that shortly after Harisheṇa's death the Aśmakas took advantage of the weakness of his son and successor to incite a devastating insurrection against him. It seems evident that Ajanta's sudden decline was caused by the Aśmaka's focus now being shifted from the pursuits of piety to those of war.

By about 479, if our analysis of the situation is correct, the deteriorating political and economic situation had forced the original patrons to abandon their previously well-laid plans entirely. For the next year or two, the only ''patronage'' activity at the site involved the hasty and helterskelter production of hundreds of Buddha images (many of them unfinished), which were carved or painted on the walls of the caves so recently abandoned by their original patrons. The many quickly painted inscriptions reveal that these intrusive images were donated, for the most part, by the monks still resident at the site.[1] But by the early 480's, both the monks and the artists must have moved away, for it is clear from the surprisingly pristine condition of the latest paintings at the site and the total lack of any subsequent donations that Ajanta must have been virtually abandoned by them. Its fate was finally sealed by the collapse of the great Vākāṭaka dynasty, which had brought it to life barely two decades before. Ajanta then lay dormant and largly undisturbed until its ''discovery'' by an English soldier in 1819.

Kanheri Caves

Consequent to the dramatic shattering of the Vākāṭaka empire shortly after 480, its former domains came under a patchwork rule for the next few dark decades. In the east, the coastal area of Konkan was consolidated by the 490's under what is described as the 'augmenting rule of the Traikūṭakas' in an inscription of 494 A.D. (Kalachuri era, 256) found at

1. See Schopen, G., 'Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 21, (1979), pp. 1-19.

the Buddhist cave site at Kanheri.[1] This would seem to be the very time when this old Hīnayāna establishment, like Ajanta before it, enjoyed a Mahāyāna renaissance. The way perhaps already had been prepared by the likely domination of the region by the Vākāṭakas during Harisheṇa's reign; indeed, sculptured panels found around the base of the large structural stūpa (now ruinous) in the so-called cemetery area are quite distinctive in character and appear to belong to the period of Vākāṭaka, rather than Traikūṭaka, control. But a decade or two later, certainly by the 490's, there is every reason to believe that artists who had formerly worked at Buddhist sites such as Ajanta and Bagh, under the patronage of the Vākāṭakas or their feudatories, now were among those who were finding much-needed employment at Kanheri and other newly flourishing Buddhist establishments such as Magathan, Kondivte, Dattapada, Mahad, Lonad, Dhamnar, Kolvi, Binnayaga, and Nasik in this same general region. One need only compare the huge 23-foot standing Buddha carved at this time in the porch of the Kanheri chaitya hall to the equally large dying Buddha of about 478 A.D. in Ajanta's Cave 26, to see the connection. Not surprisingly, the iconographic and compositional complexity of subjects familiar from Ajanta, such as the Śrāvastī Miracle and the litany of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, now increases. Futhermore, representations of female bodhisattvas, which were rarely seen at Ajanta, and then only at the very end of its development, are very common here, as are Buddhas in the so-called European pose (*pralambapādāsana*), a type which appears only in very late contexts in Vākāṭaka cave sites. Among the hundreds of votive images which were now added to Kanheri's old Hiīnayāna excavations, or included in the new Traikūṭaka period caves, perhaps the most surprising is an eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, a type which will soon appear in Himalayan and T'ang Chinese art.

The Traikūṭakas added less than two dozen new caves to the far more extensive early group at Kanheri, but these are of considerable

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1. Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*, Ootacamund, 1955, pp. 29-32 : 'Kanheri Plate of the Traikuṭakas : (Kalachuri) Year 245'.

interst, because in their various architectural features—plans and pillars and doorways and mouldings—they are clearly transitional between the Buddhist caves of the late Vākāṭaka period and the Hindu caves of the subsequent early Kalachuri phase which developed in the Bombay region during the second quarter of the sixth century.[1]

Here, too, political circumstances were the fundamental cause of change. Although inscriptions prove that the Traikūṭakas were still dominant in Konkan in the first decade of the sixth century, the Matvan plates of 533 A.D. (Kalachuri era 284) prove that the Early Kalachuris had triumphed over them sometime before that date.[2] This victory may well have signalled the end of Buddhist patronage under the Traikūṭakas at sites like Kanheri and Nasik. Certainly it marked the starting point of a remarkable burst of Hindu—specifically Śaivite—excavation activity in western India by the greatest king of the Early Kalachuri dynasty, Kṛshṇarāja (acc. c.535). He, according to the Abhona grant of his son Śaṅkaragaṇa "acquired wealth (*only*) for the sake of religious merit...and was devoted to Paśupati (*Śiva*) from his very birth."[3]

Elephanta Caves

As has been shown elsewhere, stylistic and iconographic considerations prove that the famous Great Cave at Elephanta, located on an island just off the coast from Bombay, belongs not to the eighth century, to which it was long assigned, nor even to the seventh century but must have been started before the mid-sixth.[4] Thus, its excavation coincides perfectly with the reign of Kṛshṇarāja himself, and it can be seen as an appropriate reflection of his great and growing power. Such an attribution has recently been supported by the identification of the vast numbers of small copper

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1. Leese, M., *The Traikūṭaka Dynasty and Kanheri's Second Phase of Buddhist Cave Excavation,* Ann Arbor : Univ. Microfilms, 1984.

2. Gokhale, S., 'Matvan Plates of Vikramasena, K. 284 (=533)', *Prof. G.H. Khare Felicitation Volume*, Poona.

3. Supra ref. p. 189, note 1, pp. 38-43 : 'Abhona Plates of Śaṅkaragaṇa : (Kalachuri) Year 347'.

4. Supra ref. p. 181, note 2.

coins which are found on the island as issues of Kṛshṇarāja himself.[1]

Although the Great Cave is by far the grandest excavation of the Early Kalachuris on Elephanta Island, it is not the first. It was preceded there by a number of less ambitious undertakings. Cave 2 in particular was designed very much like a Vākāṭaka vihāra, judging from the "retardatory" character of its still-incomplete porch. Probably the first of these lesser caves at Elephanta to have been begun, judging from its "priority" location, may well have been created by the descendants of the craftsmen who worked at Ajanta some fifty years before.[2]

Even more striking connections with Vākāṭaka vihāras and their decorative motifs can be found in the remarkable and little-known Śaivite cave at Jogeshvari, a suburb of Bombay. Long assigned to the eight or even ninth century—its confusion of plan and of sculptural organization considered the product of senility rather of adolescence—it has only recently been recognized as a revealing precursor of Elephanta's Great Cave.[3] Indeed, it is the earliest, and one of the largest, of all monumental Hindu cave temples! Its various courts and vestibules, as well as its square mini hall with a twenty-pillared hypostyle like one of the large Ajanta caves (but with a shrine in its center rather than at the rear) are strung out along the main east-west axis. Yet the illumination, and thus the visual focus, for the main hall comes through the three doorways and two windows of a long porch on the south side, which is designed and decorated like the front of a large Vākāṭaka vihāra. Scattered through this additively composed plan are most of the many Śaivite scenes and images later found so carefully arranged at Elephanta; however here they are of all different shapes and sizes, and disposed of as if at random.

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1. Gokhale, S., 'Elephanta Hoard of Copper Coins of Kṛṣṇarāja', paper read at All India Numismatic Conference, Indore, 1975.

2. Had not Cave 2 already been started, the Great Cave at Elephanta would surely have been located at this convenient east-facing spot, at a great saving of time and expense.

3. Spink, W., 'Jogeshvari', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art (Dr. Moti Chandra Commemorative Volume)*, 1978, pp. 1-35 and pl. I-XVI.

Thus the cave at Jogeshvari, which must have been specifically dedicated to Śiva in his incarnation as the sage Lakulīśa—since four Lakulīśa images appear at various points along the main axis—is a kind of *omnium gatherum* for a vast number of forms and motifs which look backward to the Vākāṭaka past on the one hand and forward to the more successfully integrated Great Cave at Elephanta on the other. Quite possibly, along with the nearby Śaivite cave at Mandapeshwar, which contains much the same kind of material in a simpler format, and is clearly a design-source for the East Wing of the Great Cave at Elephanta, the Jogeshvari cave was begun during the reign of Kṛshṇarāja's father, perhaps in about 525 A.D. However, like the similarly early lesser caves on Elephanta Island, neither the Jogeshvari nor Mandapeshwar caves were ever finished. It seems likely that they were abandoned when Kṛshṇarāja himself came to power and focussed his attention and his funds on his still greater monument; but conceivably they were started in Kṛshṇarāja's own reign and were left unfinished because the Great Cave at Elephanta took precedence.

The Great Cave at Elephanta can be described as a vast square pillared hall to which three expansive pillared porches have been added on the east, west, and north. It seems likely that originally there was to have been a fourth such porch on the south, which would have made the cave ''properly'' symmetrical, with its main (eastern) axis focussed very clearly on the liṅgam shrine, which itself has been displaced for practical purposes toward the rear (west). However, possibly because the technical difficulties of carving a 75 foot deep inner court of ''light well'' at the south were daunting (but not impossible as we know from the evidence to the left court at Ellora's Cave 29), and/or possibly because the planners had decided that this south wall was a perfect location for the colossal Sadāśiva image now carved there, they gave up their idea for the fourth entrance, despite the surprising disruption of plan and the conflict of axes which resulted from their decision. The ultimate effect upon the devotee is, however, overwhelming since, although the ultimate ritual

focus must be the cave's central shrine, the various paired reliefs showing Śiva in his various manifestations, which appear at the three entrances, reach a visual and conceptual culmintion in the gigantic multiheaded image that looms in the dark recesses of the south wall. King Kṛshṇarāja was quite possibly a direct descendant of the Vākāṭaka emperor Harisheṇa himself, and it is possible that he used this as a justification for his expansionist policy toward the east—the old Vākāṭaka domains—at about the middle of the sixth century.[1] In any case, it is evident that the Early Kalachuris had conquered the Aurangabad-Ellora region by the latter part of his reign, and continued to hold the region until the defeat of his grandson, Buddharāja, by the invading Chālukyas in about 600 A.D.

Caves of Ellora-Aurangabad Region

The Early Kalachuri presence in this region toward the east explains the sudden burst of Hindu patronage at Ellora shortly after 550 A.D. There, starting with the somewhat clumsily planned Cave 18, eight caves were excavated, all or most of them distinctly connected with the worship of Lakulīśa, just as their various Bombay-region prototypes had been.[2] The largest and most intriguing of these caves is the so-called Dhumar Lena, Cave 29, which ''corrects'' the confused plan of the Great Cave at Elephanta by making it conventionally symmetrical, with a main and two side entrances. All of the pairs of entrance reliefs found at Elephanta are repeated in Ellora Cave 29, although in a slightly different order. As for the three great south-wall reliefs at Elephanta, it is evident that they were going to be located as a sensible but hardly exciting ''back-up'' to shrine in Cave 29; but this work was never completed, since (as is evident from much other unfinished work in the cave) time obviously ran out before the cave's patron had realized his full intentions.[3]

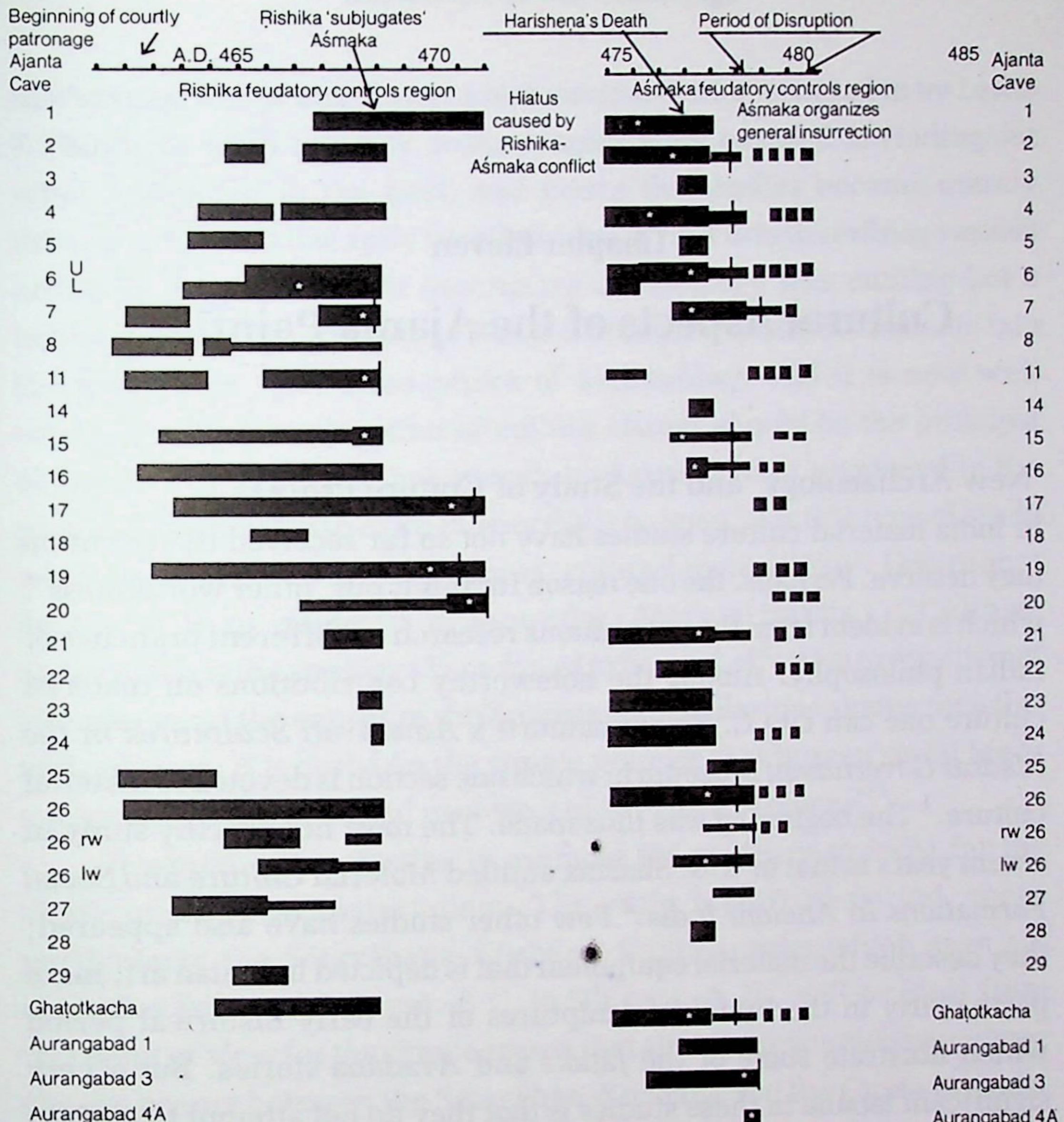
Although Ellora Cave 29 is in every way a more carefully-measured and more ''properly'' organized cave than its prototype at Elephanta, it

1. Supra ref. p.181, note 2, pp. 277-82.
2. Supra ref. p. 182, note 1.
3. Supra ref. p. 181, note 2, pp. 253-54.

lacks the earlier cave's crescent energy. This is particularly true in its stolidly slack scupltures, which even the marvelously effective illumination of the cave (due to its location in an outcropping of rock) cannot approve. The Great Cave at Elephanta, by contrast, is all in all much gloomier; but it is filled with works of a radiant authority. Needless to say both of these caves were once painted; traces remain, particularly on their ceilings.

The most splendid sculpture of the Early Kalachuri phase at Ellora is to be found in Cave 21, the so-called Rāmeśvara Cave. Here the influence of Elephanta's Great Cave is evident not only in splendid carvings such as the Dancing Śiva, the Saptamātṛkās, but also in the clear connections of its porch-like plan with that of the earlier cave's East Wing.

Equally beautiful sculptures, and only somewhat less striking architectural connections with Bombay area prototypes are to be found in a number of the late sixth century Buddhist caves carved in the hills at nearby Aurangabad, close to the old Vākāṭaka excavations which must also have been done under Kalachuri patronage, or at least with their tacit approval. The figures of female bodhisattvas that flank the doorway of Cave 7's shrine, and the female dancer accompanied by six female musicians who, quite remarkably, performs before the Buddha in that cave's dark shrine, are among the supreme creations of this or any other period in Indian art.



Known major patrons : Ajanta's Mahāyāna Phase (c. 462-c.480 A.D.)

Cave 1 : Vākāṭaka emperor Harisheṇa : ruled c. 460 - c. 477.
Cave 16 : Varāhadeva, Harisheṇa's Chief Minister : in power until 478.
Caves 17, 18, 19 (the 'Perfumed Hall'), and 20 : King Upendragupta of Ṛishika, ruling over the Ajanta region until his defeat by the Aśmakas in 472 or shortly thereafter.
Cave 26 complex (consisting of Chaitya cave 26 and its wings, together with the adjacent Caves 25 and 27) : The monk Buddhabhadra, 'attached in friendship (to the minister of the mighty king of Aśmaka) through many successive births'. Active patron from 462-468; and 475-478.
Cave 4 : Mathurādāsa, a wealthy devotee and 'owner of the cave'. Active patron from 462-468; and 475-478.

* = image carved
| = image painted

Heavy lines show more vigorous activity. Broken lines show intrusive work.

Chapter Eleven

Cultural Aspects of the Ajanta Paintings

'New Archaeology' and the Study of Culture Process

In India material culture studies have not so far received the attention they deserve. Perhaps, the one reason for this is our 'other worldliness', which is evident from the voluminous research on different branches of Indian philosophy. Among the noteworthy contributions on material culture one can cite C. Sivaramamurti's *Amarāvatī Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum* in which one section is devoted to material culture.[1] The beginning was thus made. The most noteworthy study in recent years is that of R.S. Sharma entitled *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*.[2] Few other studies have also appeared; they describe the material equipment that is depicted in Indian art, more particularly in the Buddhist sculptures of the early historical period which illustrate some of the *Jātaka* and *Avadāna* stories. But a very significant lacuna in these studies is that they do not attempt to explain the culture change that took place in the early historical period. This has been attempted in my modest study of the Ajanta paintings.[3]

Explanation of culture change is the principal objective of what is now known as 'New Archaeology'. It is this objective which allows us to study culture process and hence it is also called 'Processual Archaeology'. This revolutionary change took place in archaeology in

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1. Madras, 1941.
2. New Delhi, 1983.
3. *Ajanta — A Cultural Study*, Poona, 1973.

the 'sixties, and it was almost a one man revolution ushered in by Lewis R. Binford. Until recently archaeologists were engaged in finding out what happened in the past, and hence the studies became merely descriptive, what has aptly been branded as trait lists describing various artifacts. In a word, this descriptive archaeology was nothing but a hobby, like stamp collecting. Binford brought a whiff of fresh air into the otherwise stale atmosphere of archaeology and it is now well established that explanation of culture change should be the principal objective of it. It is just not enough to describe what happened in the past but one must also explain why did it happen. It is this type of study which is known in anthropology as 'cultural materialism'. One cannot do better than quote its propounder, Marvin Harris : ''Cultural materialism is the strategy I have found to be most effective in my attempt to understand the causes of differences and similarities among societies and cultures. It is based on the simple premise that human social life is a response to the practical problems of earthly existence.''[1]

It would be interesting to examine the evidence in India for the study of cultural materialism. The early historical period, more particularly the Sātavāhana-Kushāṇa-Gupta epochs which span six centuries from ca. 1st cent. B.C. to 5th cent. A.D., will be ideal from this point of view for the simple reason that almost a revolutionary culture change occurs between the Sātavāhan-Kushāṇa and the Gupta periods. The modest *gahapati* at the beginning of the Christian era living a simple existence becomes almost a dandy—the true *nāgaraka* of Vātsyāyana leading an aristocratic life. We already have descriptions of life in these two cultural periods, but it would be interesting to study as to why did the change take place.

Depiction of Material Life in the Ajanta Paintings

Life in India during the Sātavāhana period in the Dakshiṇāpatha is depicted in the Sāñchī and Amarāvatī reliefs whereas for the Gupta-

1. *Cultural Materialism : The Struggle for a Science of Culture*, New York, 1980, p. ix.

Vākāṭaka epoch we have to depend to a great extent on the Ajanta paintings which depict life in the Golden Age in all its kalaedioscopic variety. Of course at Ajanṭa we also fortunately have a few early paintings of the Sātavāhana period. In the Sātavāhana age, the life of the people was extremely simple, free from complexities which characterise the succeeding period. They lived in houses built of fired bricks on the *chatuḥśāla* plan having an open court in the centre surrounded by rooms. In a word it resembled the contemporary vihāras. This indicates that there were large joint families living in them with little privacy. We have an excellent illustration of such an early house in a painting in Cave IX at Ajanta.[1] But slowly a change in the house plan is introduced. In the excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur), dwelling units consisting of a couple of rooms with a verandah at the front have been exposed.[2] Even Buddhist monks seem to have preferred this plan to a large vihāra conforming to the standardised form. Excellent examples of this type are to be found in the Late Hīnayāna caves on the western coast which can be dated to the 2nd-3rd cent. A.D.[3] Although this plan did not find favour with Indians, it continues in the later period as an Ajanta illustration shows.[4] This was in all probability introduced here from the western Classical world. And considering India's flourishing trading contact with the Roman empire in the early centuries of the Christian era, this seems most plausible. Even early Gupta temples were not different; they have a squarish *garbhagṛha* with a verandah at the front and the Roman temples were also strikingly identical in plan.[5]

The change in the costume of men and women is far more remarkable. In the Sātavāhana period a man wore a short *dhotī*, ending above the knees justifying its appellation *ardhoruka*. It becomes longer,

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1. Dhavalikar, *op.cit.*, Fig. VI. 1.

2. Sankalia, H.D. and Dikshit, M.G., *Excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) 1945-46*, Poona, 1952, Fig. between 28-29.

3. Dhavalikar, M.K., *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India*, Pune, 1984, Fig. 61-62.

4. Dhavalikar, *Ajanta—A Cultural Study*, Fig. 6.2.

5. An excellent example is the temple of Nike in the Parthenon complex at Athens.

reaching the ankles, and long tufts were left loosely dangling on sides. The same was the case with women as well. The *uttarīyas* too become inordinately long and are seen fluttering at the back. They had sometimes transverse ribbings and are referred to as *bhaṅgura uttarīyas* in literature.[1] This become the raging fashion of the day and hence the love-lorn Pururavā mistook the flowing course of the Gaṅgā as the long flowing *uttarīya* of Urvaśī.[2]

So far as the upper garment is concerned, there was almost a revolution. Earlier, women hardly used any upper garment, whereas men only occasionally wore a half sleeved tunic which has been referred to as *kūrpāsaka*, because the sleeves ended at the elbow. This survives in Maharashtra even today and is called *koparī* in Marathi which is obviously derived from Sanskrit *kūrpāsaka*. But in the Gupta epoch a whole new range of garments, both for men and women comes into use. Men used tunics, either full or half-sleeved or even without sleeves. Army chiefs wore tight fitting coats, which can be identified as the *varabāṇa*[3] which seems to be of Iranian origin. Women too wore such stitched garments which included a variety of bodices, and what looks like the present day *salwār*. All these stitched garments were introduced into India by the Śakas and Kushāṇas of Central Asia. It is interesting to note how the names of these garments were Sanskritised. For instance, the lower garment of women, resembling the present day *salwār*, is called *sutthan* in Punjabi. It is derived from Sanskrit *svasthāna*[4] which is the Sanskritised form of the Central Asian *soṁstaṁnī*, and describes its close fitting nature. These close fitting stitched garments were needed in the

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1. Agrawala, V.S., 'Bhāskaravarman's Presents to Harsha', *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Vol. X, 1960, p. 102.

2. *Vikramorvaśīyam* of Kālidāsa, IV. 28.

3. Agrawala, V.S., *Harshacharita — Eka Sāṅskṛtika Adhyayana*, Patna, 1953, in Hindi, p. 150.

4. Agrawala, R.C., 'A Study of Textiles and Garments as Depicted in the Kharoshṭhī Documents from Chinese Turkestan', *Bhāratīya Vidyā*, Vol. XIV, 1953, p. 89.

harsh climate of the desert regions of Central Asia by the horsemen, but were ill-suited in the hot, humid climate of India. Hence they do not seem to have become popular in our country. The same is the case with the *chīna-cholaka*, a long loose coat brought by the Kushāṇas. It is rarely seen in the Gupta period but was again introduced by the Mughals in the medieval period and is still in use in north India as *chogā*.

Ajanta murals are of great help in studying the colour of graments. It appears from the paintings that there was a marked preference for white garments which has also been noted by Classical writers and ancient literature corroborates it. Strabo notes that ''in general, the Indians wear white clothing, white linen or cotton garments, contrary to the accounts of those who say that they wear highly coloured garments.''[1] And Arrian found Indian cotton to be of a brighter white colour than any cotton found elsewhere.[2] But one can discern a noteworthy change later, when people show a strong predilection for coloured garments. The most popular was a variety with multi-coloured stripes which has been referred to as *Indrāyudhāmbara* or *Indra-jāla-varṇāṁśuka* in the contemporary literature.[3]

Striking change also takes place in headdresses and coiffure. Earlier, women combed their hair in a single plait (*ekaveṇi*) or let them loose and wore elaborate headdresses. But later they had a bewildering variety to choose from. The raging fashion of the day was to dress the hair into a roundish bun generally at the back, but sometimes one also comes across examples where it is either on the top of the head or on sides. This style has been referred to as *dhammilla* which is probably derived from Damila › Tamila, from the region where it became popular. But it seems to be of Classical origin.[4] It appears to have been a favourite style among the Greek and Roman ladies. It perhaps came into vogue in

1. Majumdar, R.C., *Classical Accounts of India*, Calcutta, 1960, p. 281.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
3. Agrawala, V.S., 'References to Textiles in Bāṇa's *Harshacharita*', *Journal of Indian Textile History*, No. 4, 1949, pp. 65 ff.
4. Agrawala, V.S., *Harshacharita*, p. 96.

South India as is evident from its early illustrations in the Amarāvatī reliefs.[1] The style gained immense popularity in a short time for the *Gāthā-saptaśatī* (VI. 44) tells us that mere sight of *dhammilla* was enough to excite passion in a lover's heart. Even the Kushāṇa style of gathering a mop of hair in the parting of the hair in the middle has been shown to be originally Roman.

When hair was combed into a bun, it was necessary to secure it so that the hairdo remained unruffled, even in strong gush of wind. There were also other accessories such as the hair net, and the forehead band. Ajanta murals clearly show such hair nets (*jālikā*) which were ornamented with pearls (*muktājāla*)[2] and jewels (*ratnajāla*).[3] Greek women used leather bands for forehead, but Indian women may have used silken ones (*vāla-pāśya*[4]). Indian chaplets were exported to Rome. Another fashion that came into vogue was to leave curls (*chikura*) framing the face which may also be of Classical origin. In the Sātavāhana period men wore a turban, which was tied in such a way that the ball of the material along with hair formed a sort of crest at the front. But later, they wore their hair long, rolling on the nape, with curls on the forehead. This is the *siṁha-keśara* style referred to in literature, which is said to have added dignity to the personality.[5]

Jewellery too undergoes a remarkable change. Earlier all ornaments were heavy and plain. The odd-looking turban is replaced by dainty tiaras (*ardha-mukuṭa*),[6] and even jewelled crowns of the royalty were pieces of art. Large, squarish and cylindrical ear ornaments go out of vogue and their place is taken by rings (*bāli*) and discs (*tāṭaṅka-chakra*). Large, out-size necklaces with slab-like spacers (*phalaka-hāras*)[7] are

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1. Sivaramamurti, *op.cit.*, Pl. VI. 8.
2. *Meghadūta*, I. 67.
3. Agrawala, V.S., *op.cit.*, p. 130.
4. *Amarakośa*, ed. by H.D. Sharma and N.G. Sardesai.
5. *Vishṇudharmottara-Purāṇa*, III, 378, Poona, 1931, p. 155.
6. Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, XXX, 134-35.
7. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, ed. and tr. by R. Shamashastri, Mysore, 1958, p. 177.

no more to be seen; instead there is a variety of pearl necklaces, the most popular among which was *ekāvalī*, a single stringed variety with a large sapphire in the centre (*nāyaka-maṇi*). Jewelled necklets (*graiveyaka*) are also to be seen. Even bracelets, armlets and anklets become thinner, and are sometimes gem-set. The most noticeable shift was in the material; earlier, beads of semi-precious stones were used, but later, pearls become very common. We do not know how far the Romans were responsible for this change. It is well-known that they had a weakness for pearls which were imported from India. Pliny's lament that 'This is the price we pay for our luxuries and our women' is no doubt justified.

This is just a rapid survey of major changes in styles during the Sātavāhana and the Gupta periods, and there is evidence to show that many of the new styles were already introduced in the earlier period. But in a conservative society like that of India, tradition dies hard, and the new elements therefore take a considerably long time to be assimilated and finally absorbed in the cultural pattern. Hence they appear commonly only in the later period.

It may be questioned as to how far the life that is depicted in art is affected by artist's imagination. The narrative panels, either in stone or paint which we have discussed, depict the *Jātaka* and the *Avadāna* stories and episodes from Buddha's life. In Menander's time, the people knew that Buddha had lives some five thousand years ago, but the Sātavāhana and Gupta artists do not seem to be aware of this fact. That they were delineating the contemporary life becomes clear from a study of a particular panel in different regions and of different epochs. An excellent example of this is the *Chhadanta Jātaka* which seems to be very popular among the Buddhists as it occurs at Bharhut, Sāñchī, Ajanta, Amarāvatī and also in the Gandhāra art. At Ajanta, there are two paintings, one of the 1st cent. B.C. (Cave 10) and the other of the 5th cent. A.D. (Cave 17) In the latter panel, we see the king, the queen and their retinue. Their costume, jewellery, coiffure, headdresses are all in keeping with

the fashion of the 5th cent. A.D. (Cave 17). In the earlier panel also, we see the king, the queen and their retinue. But their costume, jewellery, coiffure, headdresses are all in keeping with the style which was in vogue during the Sātavāhana times in the first cent. B.C. They are all identical with those depicted in the Sāñchī reliefs[1] and are not much different from those in the Bharhut panel.[2] When we compare them with those in the panel of Ajanta Cave 17, the difference becomes clear. It only confirms the dictum that art always reflects the contemporary life.[3]

A very significant feature of the assimilation of new elements, especially foreign, in the pattern of our culture is that only those that were suited to Indian conditions or were convenient to our way of life were adapted. A case in point is the close fitting garments, such as the coat, trousers and top boots which were introduced by the Kushāṇas. The Kushāṇa kings sculptured in the Mathurā art are shown wearing them. This dress was quite convenient for the horsemen of Central Asia and as a novelty Indians might have had some fascination for it. This is clear from its representation on Gupta coins. Even Samudragupta is shown wearing it on a couple of his coin types.[4] But since it was inconvenient in the hot, humid climate of India the king discarded it, for on other coin types Samudragupta is shown wearing the typical Indian *dhotī*. The same was the case with furniture. A new type of chair was introduced in the Sātavāhana period. It had folded legs, side arms, but no back.[5] It is the *sella curulis* of the Graeco-Romans who must have brought it to India.[6] But it does not seem to have found favour with Indians as it is not seen anywhere in the later period obviously because it was not comfortable to sit in it in the true Indian fashion, that is, in the

1. Marshall, John and Foucher, Alfred, *The Monuments of Sāñchī*, Delhi, 1983, 2 Vols.
2. Barua, B.M., *Bharhut*, Calcutta, 1954, 3 Pts.
3. Hauser, Arnold, *Social History of Art*, London, 1951, 2 Vols.
4. Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Pl. V.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Yazdani, G., *Ajanta*, Pt. III, Oxford, 1946, Pl. VI, XXX, C.

cross-legged posture. There were profusely ornamented thrones (*siṁhāsanas)* with animal supports and high backs having *makara* terminals, but no side arms. Thus although the new elements were being assimilated, the process of Indianization was also on in the Gupta period.

Our contention that art always reflects the contemporary life holds good only in the case of the depiction of secular themes, but so far as religious subjects were concerned, the artist seems to have been guided by convention and tradition obviously because the constraints of religion restricted his freedom. This becomes evident when we examine the figures of the Buddha and of the gods and goddesses of different pantheons. Thus the Buddha is everywhere shown wearing the typical *saṅghāṭī* robe whether in the Sātavāhana or in the Gupta art, and even in the Gandhāra art.[1]

Factors Responsible in Shaping the Cultural Pattern

It must also be examined as to how far environment was responsible in shaping the cultural pattern. As a matter of fact the New Archaeology defines culture as "an extrasomatic means of adaptive system that is employed in the integration of society with its environment and with other socio-cultural systems."[2] No human culture can therefore flourish in an adverse environment and conversely, a congenial environment will certainly be conducive to human culture. Considerable work has been done in the western world in the reconstruction of past environment, but in India we have hardly made the beginning. How do we then know about the environment in India in the early historical period? We have to depend on minor scraps of evidence furnished by our ancient literature. There is yet another source which can come to our aid, but has to be used with caution. Scientists have noted that whenever there is an intensely cold climate in the temperate zones, the tropical countries suffer droughts. "Whenever the high latitudes cool, monsoons tend to

1. Dhavalikar, M.K., 'Ajanta : The Perception of the Past', in Katherine Asher (ed.), *Perceptions of the Past*.

2. Binford, Lewis R., *An Archaeological Perspective*, New York, 1972, p. 20.

fail.''[1] No satisfactory explanation for this curious phenomenon has yet been found. Similarly, it appears that when the temperate lands experience a warm climate, tropical countries like India enjoy a wet phase with adequate rainfall.[2] It should, therefore, be clear that although we do not have much evidence for climatic changes in the ancient past, we can to a certain extent visualise as to what was the environment like in the early historical period. It has been observed that the thousand year period from c. 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. is characterised by a warm climate in Europe and the glaciers in the Alps started retreating from c. 300 B.C. to 400 A.D.[3] This is known as the Atlantic phase. In Egypt this period is marked by high floods in the Nile indicating excellent rainfall. It is this evidence from Egypt which goes a long way in inferring that in India too the rainfall must have been very good. This may appear rather far-fetched but it has been established that the monsoon fluctuations tend to occur simultaneously over large areas of Africa and South Asia.[4] This correspondence between the Nile floods and rainfall pattern in India was noted even by Alexander's historians[5] and the same is confirmed by the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya (Ch. XXIV, Section 116). According to him, the rain that falls in the country of *Jāṅgala* (desert regions) was half as much as in the moist countries, but in the case of countries which were fit for agriculture, 23 *droṇas* (46 inches) in Avanti (which is roughly the Malwa region of the present Madhya Pradesh) whereas in the Aśmaka

1. Sulman, Felix G., *Short and Long Term Changes in Climate,* Florida, 1982, p. 18.

2. Currie, G. and Fairbridge, R.W., 'Periodic 18.6 Years and Cyclic 11 Year Induced Drought and Flood in Northeast China', *Quaternary Science Review*, Vol. IV, 1985, p. 111.

3. Lamb, H.H., *Climate — Past, Present and Future,* Vol. 2, London, 1927, pp. 424 f.

4. Walker, Gilbert, 'On the Meteorological Evidence for the Supposed Changes in Climate in India', in *Long Range Forecasting of Monsoon Rainfall,* Collected Papers of Sir Gilbert Walker, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 16-22.

5. Warren, Bruce A., 'Ancient and Medieval Records of the Monsoon', in *Monsoon*, ed. by Fein, J.S. and Stephen, P.L., 1987, p. 249.

country, which can be identified with Central Maharashtra, it was 13.5 *droṇas* (27 inches) and an immense quantity in Aparānta (Konkan). This would show that the rainfall in the early historical period was somewhat more than what it is at present. The monsoon was probably regular and vigorous and hence its pattern was observed by Hippalus, a Greek sailor, who is credited with its discovery. The period from c. 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. witnessed the flowering of culture in many parts of the Old World. It was an age of empires : the Hellenic-Hellenistic and Roman in Europe, the Persian empire in West Asia, the Han in China and the Mauryan, Śuṅga, Kushāṇa, Sātavāhana and the Gupta in India. This could happen because of the congenial environment. The Indian genious reached its zenith during the early historical period and there was remarkable development in every field of human activity. There was cultural efflorenscence when the environment was congenial and the quality of life deteriorated when it was adverse.

But all good things must come to an end. The deterioration set in from the 5th century onwards. The break up of the Roman empire caused decline in trade. Added to this was the Hūṇa invasion which gave shattering belows to the Gupta empire. The degeneration that set in was so severe that we hardly have any trace of material culture in the archaeological records of the post-4th century. Decline and decay is witnessed everywhere. Professor R.S. Sharma, the doyen of Indian historians, has very meticulously analysed the archaeological evidence from all over the country.[1] The evidence reveals that urban centres suffered a sharp decline after the third century and a sort of process of deurbanization began.[2] The literary evidence too points to decline and Yuan Chwang, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim, also testifies for it. As trade with Roman empire dwindled, there was no industry worth the name, and probably there was not much internal trade if the evidence

1. *Urban Decay (c. 300-1000)*, New Delhi, 1987.

2. Dhavalikar, M.K., 'The Second Deurbanization', *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XVI, 1990, pp. 211-17.

of coins is any indication. Most of the post-Gupta dynasties in India did not issue any coinage. Europe too, after the decline of the Roman empire, was passing through troubled times whereas West Asia witnessed the rise of Islam and the consequent turmoil. Even the towns on the Silk Road in Bactria and Central Asia were on the decline. Economic activity was thus coming to a grinding halt. Alongwith the cessation of foreign trade, colonization of new areas and consequent deforestation are also cited as causes.[1]

But a very important cause seems to be the adverse environment, which begins from c. 400 A.D. In Europe there was an intensely cold climatic phase from the 4th to the 9th cent. A.D. We may, therefore, infer that there was marked aridity in India. There is evidence in our ancient literature which indicates that this period was marked by frequent droughts and famines.[2] The foregoing analysis of the evidence for material culture from Ajanta amply brings into sharp focus the factors that were responsible for culture change in the early historical period. It shows how many elements of culture which were introduced by foreigners in India were assimilated in the pattern of culture and were Indianised. The simple *gahapati* of Hāla's *Gāthā-saptaśatī* becomes a true *nāgaraka* of Vātsyāyana in the Golden Age.

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1. Sharma, R.S., *op. cit.*, p. 122.
2. See for a discussion, Dhavalikar, M.K., 'The Second Deurbanization', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. XVI, 1990, pp. 211-17.

Chapter Twelve

Transition from Gupta Classicism to Medievalism

Nature of Gupta Classicism

The establishment of the Gupta empire, particularly over greater part of North India, facilitated "the efflorescence of Indian genius in all its aspects" fostered by "the resurgence of a conscious national ideal."[1] That is why the art of the Gupta period is referred to as the 'Classical Art' of India and the Gupta Age is called the Classical or Golden Age of Indian history. The term 'classical' usually means 'of the first rank or authority', 'an age in which literature, architecture and fine arts reach a high level of excellence to form a standard or model for later times'. The Gupta art is 'classical' because of its intrinsic quality of high-order, which was shared throughout the country but was never parallelled earlier or later, and which, serving as a veritable index, helps us appreciate the nature of achievements accruing to anterior or posterior artistic practices in the country.[2] Kālidāsa, the greatest poet-dramatist of the age, describes the art of the period as 'fine art' (*lalita-kalā*).[3] It reflected a passion for refinement that was obvious in every aspect of life; "it eliminated ponderousness and volume and concentrated more and more on elegance, producing ultimately a surpassing grace and delicacy which distinguish Gupta work from that of all other ages."[4]

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1. Saraswati, S.K., *A Survey of Indian Sculpture*, Calcutta, 1957, p. 120.
2. Bhattacharyya, D.C., in *A Comp. History of India*, Vol. III, Pt. II, p. 1173. For a discussion on classicism of the Gupta age, see my *The Image of Classical India*, Jodhpur, 1997.
3. *Raghuvaṁśa*, VIII.67.
4. Agrawala, V.S., *Studies in Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, p. 245.

Apart from acute passion for refinement the Gupta art, specially sculpture, was characterised by several other features. Firstly, in the Gupta sculpture human figures are not merely a manifestation, but rather the representation, of Nature with all its grandeur. ''The Gupta sculptor used the human figure as the vehicle for the transmutation of Nature into art.'' Naturally, therefore, his main concern was the human figure and how to make the various features of its form relevant to what exists in the vegetal and animal worlds; in other words, in Nature at large. In fact, the articulation of all natural phenomena in terms of the human figure was the basic artistic proposition before the Gupta sculptor, whereas the sculptors of Bharhut and Sāñchī were content with representing the human figure as a complement of flora and fauna.

Secondly, Gupta sculpture is, more consciously and explicitly than most schools of plastic art, a synthesis between the external form and the inner meaning, like the Kālidāsian imagery of the union of Speech and Thought (*vāg-artha-viva samp̣rktau*).[1] According to V.S. Agrawala,[2] the introvert vision underlying the outer forms of Gupta art is writ eloquently in the faces of the Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical images, which combine an intense religious feeling with a tranquil and classical charm. Only such an expression can represent the achievement of a true harmony of thought and action in the actual lives of men. In accordance with this new outlook, each seeker looked for reality within himself. The spiritual content of the Gupta Buddha image is sharply distinguished from the open, smiling countenance of the Kushāṇa Bodhisattva. The art creations of the Golden Age are expressions of the spiritual harmony and blissful realisation that were the hall-mark of the superior motifs of thought and life comprised in the Gupta culture.

''The ideal of Gupta culture was harmony and synthesis. ...On the one hand, it invokes beauty with all its perfection of physical form and ornamental and decorative make-up, and on the other art pays full

1. *Raghuvaṁśa*, I.1.
2. Agrawala, V.S., *op.cit.*

homage to the ideal of spiritual realisation as seen in the figures of Śiva, Vishṇu, Buddha, Bodhisattva, etc. ...Serenity, repose, calmness, joy, unruffled fixity of the mind, control over the objects of senses, perfect knowledge, compassion, discrimination and wisdom — these are some of the great principles of life and character which the divine images make manifest...''[1]

Another feature of the Gupta classical art is its wide geographical range. ''From Dahparbatiyā in Assam to Mīrpurkhās in Sind, monuments of Gupta sculpture are scattered all over the country-side. Great centres of the art included Sārnāth, Mathurā, Pāṭaliputra, Devagarh, Bhītargaon, Udaigiri, Nāgod, Bhumarā, Ajantā, and the Gandhāra province, where a great mass of remarkable sculpture, in stone and in stucco or baked clay, was produced. Outside India, the school exercised far-reaching influence on the art of China and the Far-East, moulding them into something of an all-Asian pattern.''[2] Elsewhere, the same scholar states that the Gupta art not only filled the entire country from one end to the other, but also inundated the surrounding regions in a peripheral overflow. It was truly a nation-wide movement in the sphere of art with many a centre functioning in each direction and each region displaying a spontaneous exuberance. Wheresoever the Bhāgavata religion spread its benign influence backed by an impassioned literary appeal, art monuments sprang up in its train as visible reflectors of the popular surcharge. The influence of the art of Madhyadeśa is patent in every detail of sculpture and architecture, whether the monument was raised in the east or in the west.[3] What was achieved in the Gupta age at Mathurā and Sarnath did not remain confined to these two places alone. The experience gained at these centres was presumably shared by various other places throughout India, and all the regions naturally produced sculptures which qualitatively approximated the creations of the

1. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

Madhyadeśa. Thus, in the classical Gupta art all parts of India shared some basic norms and forms. Local preferences did exist, but there was hardly any symptoms of assertive tendency on their part. Moreover, these elements of regional moods were well integrated in the art form in such a way that the product did seldom lose its homogeneity. This was because of the existence, during that period, of an overall political, and as such cultural, authority in operation throughout the country.

The Gupta sculpture is usually found integrated with the architecture of structural temples and cave-shrines. In the Kushāṇa period the image was predominant and the modest shrine was only just beginning to appear. It more or less resembled the form of a *gandha-kuṭī* from which the temple art seems to have evolved[1] improvised with three plain slabs held in position by a flat top. In the Gupta period the image of the deity, now fully evolved, found its counterpart in a fully evolved temple with flat roof, porch and plinth. The two match admirably. Subsidiary images and reliefs of attendant figures also find their due place in the scheme of temple-decoration.[2] The stucco figures and terracottas connected with these temples show an equally high degree of workmanship. Both in stone and in modelled bricks, an infinite variety of scroll-motifs is found. The most significant example of this decoration may be seen in the casing slabs round the Dhāmekh Stūpa at Sarnath, perhaps the most successful example of large surface-decoration in this technique in ancient India. Contemporary literature refers to scroll-work as *patrāvalī*, *patralatā*, *patrāṅguli*, etc.[3] The fashion for deep-cut scroll-work found its culmination in the stone *jālī*.

Factors in Transition from Classicism to Medievalism

The question of the transition from classicism to medievalism in culture, art and history of India[4] is indeed a part of the general problem of the

1. Cf. Agrawala, P.K., *Gupta Temple Architecture*, Ch. I.
2. Agrawala, V.S., *op.cit.*, p. 248.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
4. For a detailed discussion on the rise of medievalism in Indian history, see my

periodisation of Indian history. There is so far no generally agreed upon scheme of periodisation, but in view of the obvious weaknesses of other schemes, historians generally follow the European practice and divide Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern periods. But there is some confusion about the duration of the classical period within the broader limits of ancient period. Usually the age of the imperial Guptas is equated with the classical age of India,[1] but from the cultural point of view there is no unanimity about its upper and lower limits. Its upper limit is sometimes extended to c. 750 A.D. and the lower one is so stretched as to include even the Maurya age in it. It is not surprising since in Europe also historians and chroniclers use the term 'ancient' as almost synonymous with the age of the classical Graeco-Roman civilization. We may, therefore, concede that in India also the same situation existed and that the age of the imperial Guptas marked the efflorescence and culmination of earlier tendencies many of which go back to the Maurya period and that much of its glory continued for about two centuries or more after the fall of the Gupta empire.

But what about the beginning of the medieval period? Did the ancient period end with the end of the classical age or continued right upto the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate as some historians believe? The advent of the Muslims in India is generally seen as marking the end of the ancient period, and works on ancient Indian history by eminent historians such as R.D. Banerji, R.C. Majumdar, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and R.S. Tripathi carry its narrative roughly up to 1206 A.D. Many other dates have also been suggested with regard to the starting point for the

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History and Historiography of the Age of Harsha, Jodhpur, 1992, pp. 240-72. Also see fn. on the next page.

1. Cf. Munshi, K.M., Foreword to *CA*, p. xiv-xv; Thapar, Romila, *A History of India*, Vol. I, 1966, Ch. 7; *idem*, 'Aśokan India and the Gupta Age', in A.L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, London, 1975, pp. 38,46; Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, III, Pt. I, (A.D. 300-985), New Delhi, 1981, p. 105; Dandekar, R.N., *ibid.*, p. 279; Chhabra, B.Ch., Agrawala, P.K., Agrawal, Ashvini and Goyal, Shankar (eds.), *Reappraising Gupta History for S.R. Goyal*, New Delhi, 1992.

medieval period—the establishment of the Kushāṇa dynasty (Rapson), rise of the Guptas (Marshall), 647 (V.A. Smith), 916 (H.C. Ray), and 997 (K.M. Munshi) being some of them. But to us it appears that no exact date can be fixed for cultural periods. The real problem is not of the actual dates but of the determination of the period of operation of those factors and forces that impart an age its distinctive character. The operation of such factors and forces is usually slow and overlapping, for some of them emerge somewhat late, some fade away earlier than others and some continue to operate quite late in the next period. A cultural trend might have had a long history before it finally emerges in a definite form and likewise might continue to exist in a changed form for some time even after it apparently ceased to exist. That being so, one cannot hope to have fixed dates in the periodisation of history; one can only try to determine the main period of operation of those tendencies which differentiate an epoch from the preceding and succeeding ones. Processes of transition in polity, society, economy, art and culture take long to fructify and cannot be associated with a fixed date. All that we can do is to try to find out whether these processes converged at some point of time.[1]

In India the transformation of the classical heritage into medieval culture did not take place all at once. It was brought about slowly in the course of several centuries intervening the decline of the Gupta empire and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. That is why the culture of this period, specially in the two post-Gupta centuries, on the one hand,

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1. Cf. Sharma, R.S., 'Problem of Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Indian History', in *The Indian Historical Review*, March 1974, Vol. I, No. 1, pp.1-9. Cf. also Ray, N.R., 'The 'Medieval' Factor in Indian History', being the address of the General President of the twenty-nineth session of the Indian History Congress, Patiala, 1967, pp. 1-42; Thakur, V.K., 'Transition from the Ancient to the Medieval Period', in Devahuti (ed.), *Problems of Indian Historiography*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 79-82; Sharma, R.S., *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, New Delhi, 1983, Ch. XVI; Yadava, B.N.S., 'The Accounts of the Kali Age and the Social Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', in D.N. Jha (ed.), *Feudal Social Formations in Early India*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 65-112.

seems to have much in common with the classical culture of the Guptas and, on the other, appears to be nearer to the culture of the Sultanate period with the difference that in the post-Gupta centuries, unlike the Sultanate period, the Muslims were not the dominant political power in northern India. We, therefore, believe that the beginning of the medieval period in Indian history may broadly be traced from the fall of the Gupta empire itself, though it may be readily conceded that the period of about two centuries, roughly from the fall of the Gupta empire (550 A.D.) and the rise of the Pratihāras (c. 750 A.D.) sheds light on the classical and medieval periods both, by a sort of *dehalīdīpaka-nyāya* (the maxim that a lamp placed on the threshhold illumines both the inside and outside of a room) and thus belongs to both.

In Europe one of the main factors that led to the transition from classical to middle ages was the immigration and invasions of the barbarian nomads. On the one hand, it resulted in the barbarisation of the classical culture and, on the other, imparted a new vigour to the European society. The immediate consequence of the nomadic pressure, culminating with that of the Huns, was the breaking up of the Roman empire. With this began the process that slowly resulted in the formation of the regional kingdoms of the Franks, Germans, Lombards, Slavs, Normans, etc. in the early medieval period. The role of the Central Asian nomads and other foreign invaders in Indian history, in the centuries preceding and following the fall of the Gupta empire, was almost similar.

As in Europe the pressure of the foreign tribes not only shattered the imperial fabric of India, it also corrupted her classical values, modified her social and economic institutions and generated a sense of pessimism leading to the theory of social decline in the Kali Age which the post-Gupta literature and epigraphs so vividly describe. On the positive side, the arrival of the foreign tribes imparted a new vigour and vitality to the Indian society, just as the Germanic tribes had done in the decadent Rome. According to N.R. Ray, the emergence of the medieval factor in Indian sculpture and painting was largely due to the impact of

the Central Asian nomads. In this connection the effeminate and irreligious character of the kings of the sixth century A.D., who have been so roundly denounced by Yaśodharman of Malwa (known date 532 A.D.), with vigour and vitality of the Gurjara-Pratihāras of Kanauj offers an interesting comparison. Indeed, the age of the imperial Gurjara-Pratihāras has been compared with the period of the Carolingian Renaissance of the medieval Europe. As a matter of fact, not only the Gurjara-Pratihāras but several other Rajput dynasties contained Scythic, Hūṇa or Gurjara blood in their veins though many of them, in course of time, became mixed up with the indigenous people, specially Brāhmaṇas (who, as a result of the growing feudal tendencies, were emerging as one of the most important elements of the ruling aristocracy of the country) and the ancient republican tribes of the Punjab and Rajasthan (which had lost political power only recently in the Gupta age) and probably also the aborginal tribes of Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, etc. (which, when Hinduised, were readily accepted within the pale of the orthodox society).

Other main factors that played a significant role in the transformation of the classical society in Europe as well as India were feudalism and regionalism. As in the early medieval Europe, in India also the rise and growth of feudalism in the post-Gupta age was concomitant and connected with the growth of regional tendencies in life. To some extent foreign tribes which established their own cultural zones (such as the Gurjaradeśa) and feudal system (which thrived on the localisation of industries, emphasis on agrarian economy and decline of trade and commerce) stimulated this tendency. In the classical age the farflung corners of the country were linked up through a network of roads and rivers and traders moved from one part of the country to another and also to foreign lands. Consequently, regionalism and insularity were cut across by the hook up of regional economy with the national economic structure. But in the post-classical period the absence of a centralized authority increased localism and insularity in economic life.

The formation of regional cultural units such as Andhra, Assam, Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, etc. and the emergence of regional languages and literatures started from sixth-seventh centuries. Faint beginnings of regional and cultural personality-consciousness are found in other parts of the country also. Bengal was divided into two main units, Gauḍa and Vaṅga, and later the whole region was named after Vaṅga. Yuan Chwang mentions several nationalities. The *Mudrārākshasa* of Viśākhadatta speaks of different regions whose inhabitants differed in customs, clothing and language while the *Kuvalayamālā* (eighth century) notes the existence of 18 major nationalities and describes the anthropological character of 16 peoples, pointing out their psychological features and citing the samples of their languages.

The post-classical Indian society was greatly disturbed by the new religious thought-currents also. In this period, as in the classical age itself, Indian rulers generally followed the policy of religious toleration and did not confine their patronage to any one particular religion or sect. In the social sphere, the spirit of toleration manifested itself in the spirit of accommodation usually shown by the members of various sects towards each other, and in the worship of syncretic deities emphasizing the union or identity of the deities of two or more sects, though below the surface one may notice dissensions among various cults which were actually religious manifestations of the socio-economic conflicts of the time.

In the post-classical period the majority of the people of India apparently followed various sects and cults of Paurāṇika Hinduism. The study of the Vedas and Vedic religion was still popular and orthodox Hindus loved to trace all their sects to the ultimate authority of the Vedas, though the cult of sacrifice existed only as a casual accompaniment of the Paurāṇika Hinduism. The influence of Jainism was restricted to certain areas, specially Rajasthan and Gujarat, while Buddhism which was declining very fast, almost totally disappeared from the Indian scene by the close of the twelfth century.

The Paurāṇika Hinduism itself was divided into a number of cults and sects. Among them were included Śaivism, Vaishṇavism and Śāktism, not to mention a large number of minor sects and sub-sects, centring round the worship of gods like Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Brahmā, etc. Of these probably Śaivism was the most popular one specially among the ruling aristocracy. It had become divided into several branches — Śaiva, Pāśupata, Kāpālika, Kālāmukha, Kaula and many others. Many of these sects became monastic in character. The chief feature of Vaishṇavism of this period was the worship of the *avatāras* (incarnations of Vishṇu), specially Kṛshṇa, Rāma and Ādivarāha. Śakti or Devī was also worshipped under various names — Durgā, Kālī, Chaṇḍī, Bhairavī, etc.

The popular or conventional form of the Hindu sects was characterized by the worship of numerous deities in temples built by kings, *sāmantas* and rich people. They were endowed with grants of land, tolls and taxes. Temple- and monastery-building activities, which acquired momentum in the later Gupta age, reached their climax during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Great temples and monasteries of this period possessed large estates and enormous wealth, with the result that the priestly class, as in medieval Europe, acquired a powerful hold over the people. Even the Jaina priestly class appears to have been organised on quasi-feudal lines.

Emergence of Medieval Trends in Indian Art

The disintegration of the Gupta empire and the rise of feudalism, impact of foreign invaders, regionalism, insularity, growth of Smārta-Paurāṇika religion and Tāntrika tendencies were concomitant with and brought about a change of scene in the sphere of art as well.

The rise of feudalism influenced the post-Gupta art in several ways. It undermined the economic role and social status of the mercantile and commercial classes of *śreshṭhīs* (bankers) and *sārthavāhas* (caravan-leaders) and of the urban class of *nāgarakas* (cultured citizens). The economic, social and political position of the new class of *sāmantas* of

varying status was strengthened. The number of feudal chiefs went on multiplying with the crystallization of feudalism after 550 A.D. The ancient religious art at Bharhut, Sāñchī, Karle, Kanheri, Junnar, Amarāvatī, Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa, etc., was patronized mainly by the mercantile and commercial classes, artisan and craft guilds as well as the royal families. But the art of the period from c. 550 A.D. onwards was supported mainly by the kings of different principalities, feudatories, military chiefs, etc., who alone usually could own and donate land to religious institutions.

The Rajput chiefs of the post-Gupta period, many of whom were Hinduized foreigners or Hinduized tribals, strove hard to glorify themselves. For being accorded a high status in the caste hierarchy they depended upon the support of the priest class, and their keenness in this regard led to the practice of extensive gifts (*dāna*) to the Brāhmaṇas. Epigraphic evidence supports the fact that the kings of the leading dynasties from the sixth century onwards performed ceremonial *dānas* such as *hiraṇyagarbha*, *shoḍasha mahādāna*, *saptasāgara mahādāna*, *dharitrīdāna* and even *brahmāṇḍadāna*. The wealth and power bestowed by them made the priests of the period greedy and lover of luxury. This psychology was in perfect consonance with and to a great degree the cause of craze for the sensual indulgence which dominated the literature and art of the period. *Pūrtadharma*, which involved the building of temples, tanks and works of public utility, was emphasized as the highest mode of religion in the Purāṇas. The importance of *pūrta* for the art activities of the period cannot be gainsaid. In the Upanishads *pūrta* was meant for fools who go to the lower worlds, whereas *tapas* was the highest virtue. In the Purāṇas, on the other hand, temple-building is said to be more meritorious than the performance of the Vedic sacrifices. *Pūrtadharma* was thus the dominant ideology behind the large-scale building of temples in this period. Inspired by this ideology, numerous land-owning *sāmantas*, princes and kings of the period, who wanted to acquire *puṇya* (merit) and *kīrti* (fame), built temples and donated land

and villages for their maintenance.

In the post-Gupta age architectural activity in the form of structural temples, was also inspired by competition among various cults and sects nurtured by the affluence of their royal, feudal or mercantile patrons. These temples installed images of the cult icons and of the *pārśvadevatās* and the *parivāradevatās*. For this the artist's services were obtained who got praise and payment, and also future commissions, only if he did his work to the satisfaction of the patrons.

The Smārta-Paurāṇika religion of the post-Gupta age was influenced by the magical elements such as *maṇḍalas*, *yantras*, *nyāsas* and *mantras*[1] which soon became widespread through the patronage given by the kings to Tāntrikism and in the later centuries some of the Tāntrika sects, especially the Pāśupatas, were invited by the kings of various regions to settle in their kingdoms. In the fifth-seventh centuries many Brāhmaṇas received lands in Nepal, Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Central India and the Deccan, where Tāntrika texts, shrines and practices appeared about this time. Tāntrikism permeated every sect and religion—Jainism, Buddhism, Śaivism and Vaishṇavism, and from the seventh century onwards continued to hold ground throughout the medieval period.[2] As a matter of fact Tāntrikism influenced the mental attitude of almost all the sects and cults of the period in varying degrees. This contributed to the esoteric character of the art as well, though esoteric elements thus introduced into art were appreciated only by a limited few who were initiated into the doctrine.

After the collapse of the Gupta empire, political disintegration gave rise to numerous petty states in North India which in turn resulted in the rise of regional schools of art. Specially in the post-650 A.D. period, when feudal tendencies were ascendant, numerous local centres of art grew up. For about a thousand years, roughly from about the third

1. Even the Gangadhar inscription of the first quarter of the fifth century A.D. refers to *tantra* and *ḍākinīs*. Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, p. 347.

2. Desai, Devangana, 'Art Under Feudalism in India (c. 500-1300 A.D.)', *IHR*, March 1974, Vol. I, No.1, p.12.

century B.C. to the end of sixth century A.D., Indian art admits, despite local variations due to local tastes, of a common denominator at each different stage of its evolution. But now regional spirit began to assert itself. About the middle of the eighth century A.D., the process of regionalisation seems to have been completed, and thenceforth is noticed the rise and growth of a number of 'provincial' schools of art, spread over the length and breadth of the country. The 'classical' idiom was now interpreted in terms of the varied local ethnic-cultural background. Local themes and visions predominated the art of this period, though its all-India tradition persisted. The temples at Bhubaneshwar in Orissa, Osia in Rajasthan and Aihole and Pattadakal near Dharwar indicate new experiments in the ground plans, śikhara designs, etc. according to regional patterns.

No longer satisfied with the flat-roofed shrines of the Gupta period, new fashions in architecture concerned themselves with the development of the *śikharas* and *maṇḍapas*, and bold architects began to convert the entire mountain blocks into monolithic shrines resembling Kailāsa and Meru. Both royalty and the people were motivated by the same spirit. The Kailāsa temple of Ellora was the outcome of the grand conception of the Rāshṭrakūṭa emperors in the eighth century. The ideal divine abode of Śiva and Pārvatī on the mount Kailāsa was recreated on earth, as if in the form of the Kailāsa temple. Even within particular style regional variations developed. Nāgara style of temple architecture, prevalent in the region between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas, developed regional variations. Such variations were caused by local conditions, different directions in development as well as assimilation of extraneous trends whenever these made themselves felt.

In sculpture, the images project the emotional experience and ideology of the time and place. The refined and modest conventions of the Gupta period were replaced in the early medieval age by colossal creations. Art now fulfilled its purpose by the comprehensive narration of cosmic themes taken from the life-stories of gods and demons, and by

interpreting the spiritual message of the age through a significant symbolism.[1] Thus, the Tāntrika atmosphere pervades the figures of dancers in the Paraśurāmeśvara temple and the fierce forms of gods and goddesses in the Vaitāla temple at Bhubaneshwar. In the rock-cut sculptures of Ellora (seventh-eighth centuries) one finds the divinities engaged in violent struggle against their enemies. The myths narrated in the Purāṇas and the epics provide new themes.

Thus, during the early medieval period art movements in the different regions tended to separate from one another, and a dialogue between one artistic zone and the other for sharing a common artistic vision and for undertaking a journey towards a common goal was minimised. In fact, the art scene was gradually seized upon, as if by 'a sort of bankruptcy in creativity'. The art expressions tended to become more and more merely gestures without conviction, performance without feeling. Sculptural expressions tended towards non-communicability denuding the sculpture of all the qualities of excellence of the earlier periods : it lost much of the aesthetic charm and became highly mechanised and conventional. It was no longer illuminated by the spiritual experience of the sculpture and ceased to be intelligible to the people at large. Art, particularly sculptural art of this period, despite its prolific productive spree patronised by the affluent religious treasuries, failed to share the hope, aspiration and contemplation of the people in general. This amounted to the loss of the two most essential and vital characteristics of classicism, viz., the roundness of the form and its flowing linear rhythm. Consequently, now the sculptural productions tended to become more and more denuded of the essence of classicism. Of course an uncomfortable search for a direction remained, but what emerged out of it was in no way as brilliant as what had preceded. There arose a different approach towards art which is what is referred to as the 'medieval factor' or 'medievalism' in Indian art.

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1. Agrawala, V.S., *op.cit.*, p. 257.

Bibliographical Index

This Bibliographical Index lists the names of modern scholars and art-historians alongwith their monographs and select contributions to research journals, etc. (mentioned in italics). Detailed references to them will be found on the pages of this work (given in Roman Numerals) where they have been referred to. No scholar or work not discussed or mentioned in the present monograph has been included here.

List of Plates

We acknowledge our gratefulness to the authorities of the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi (ASI), the Asian Art Archives of the University of Michigan, U.S.A. (AAAUM) and the Centre for Art and Archaeology, American Institute of Indian Studies, Ramnagar, Varanasi (AIIS) for the majority of excellent photographs reproduced here. We are also grateful to several individual scholars for some photographs which have been credited to them in this list.

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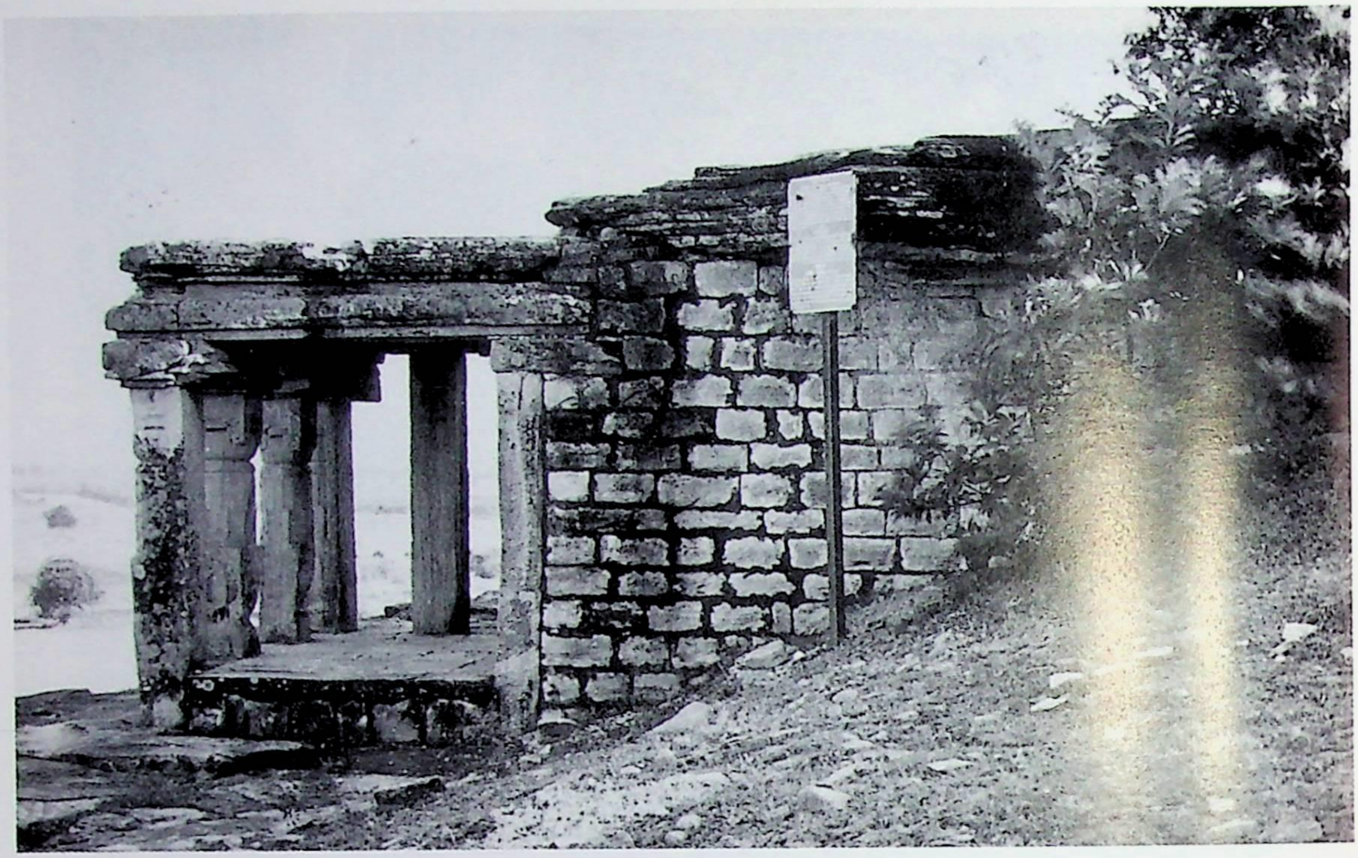
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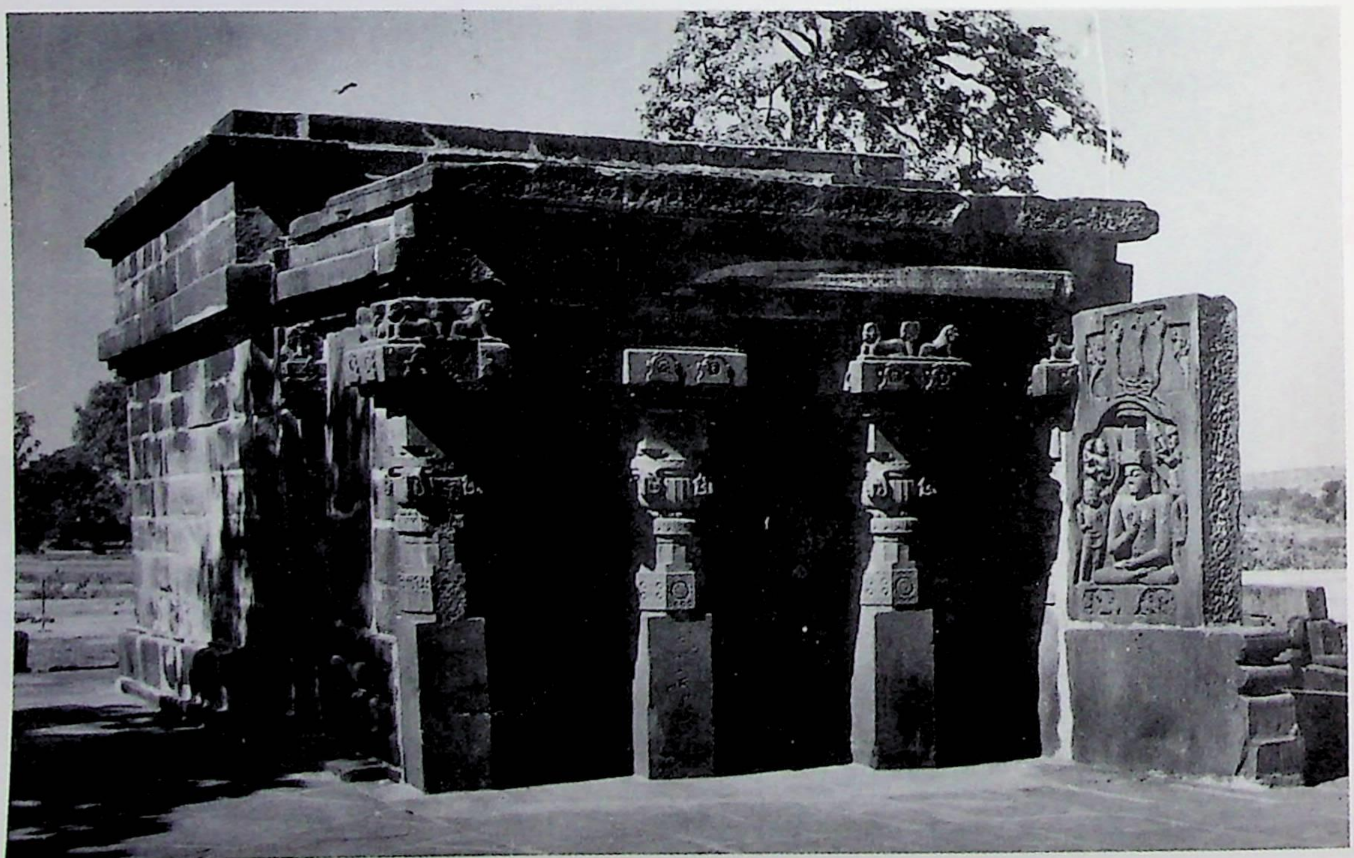
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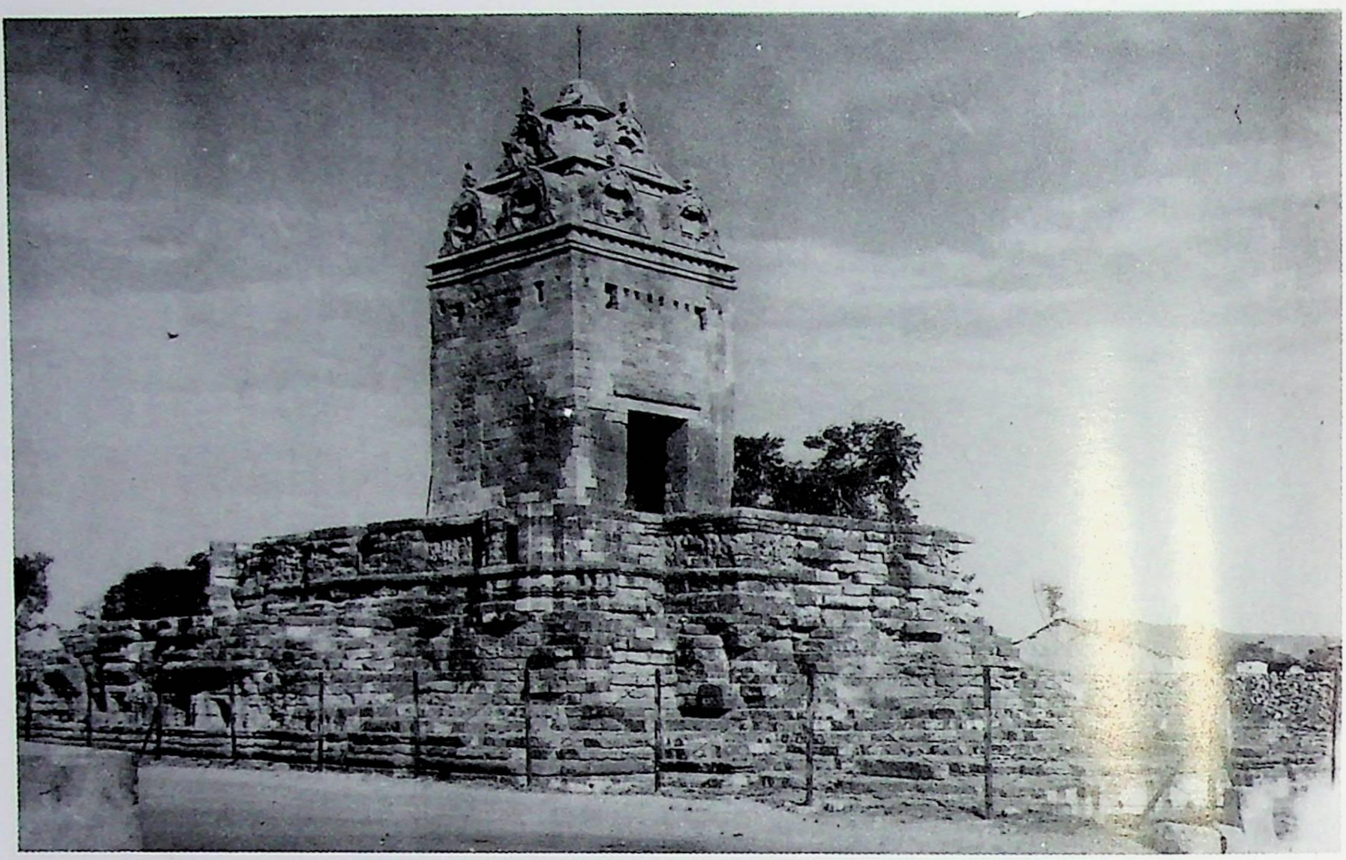
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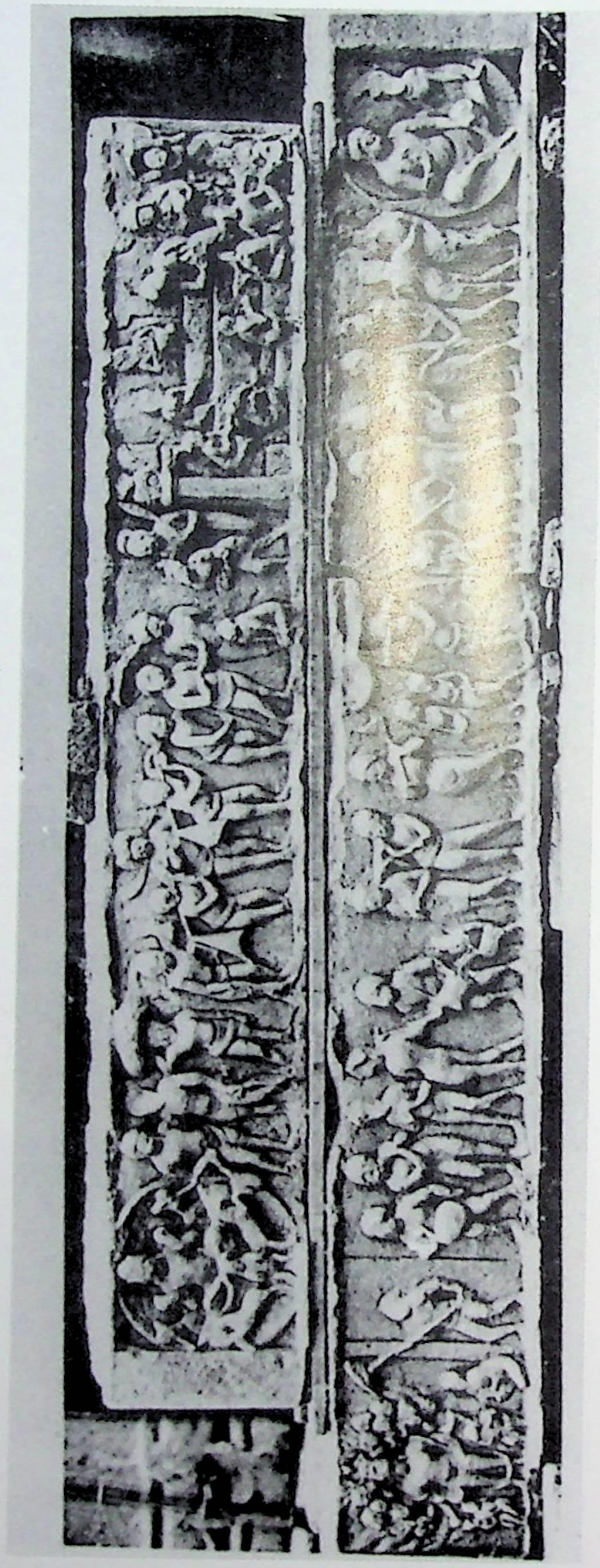


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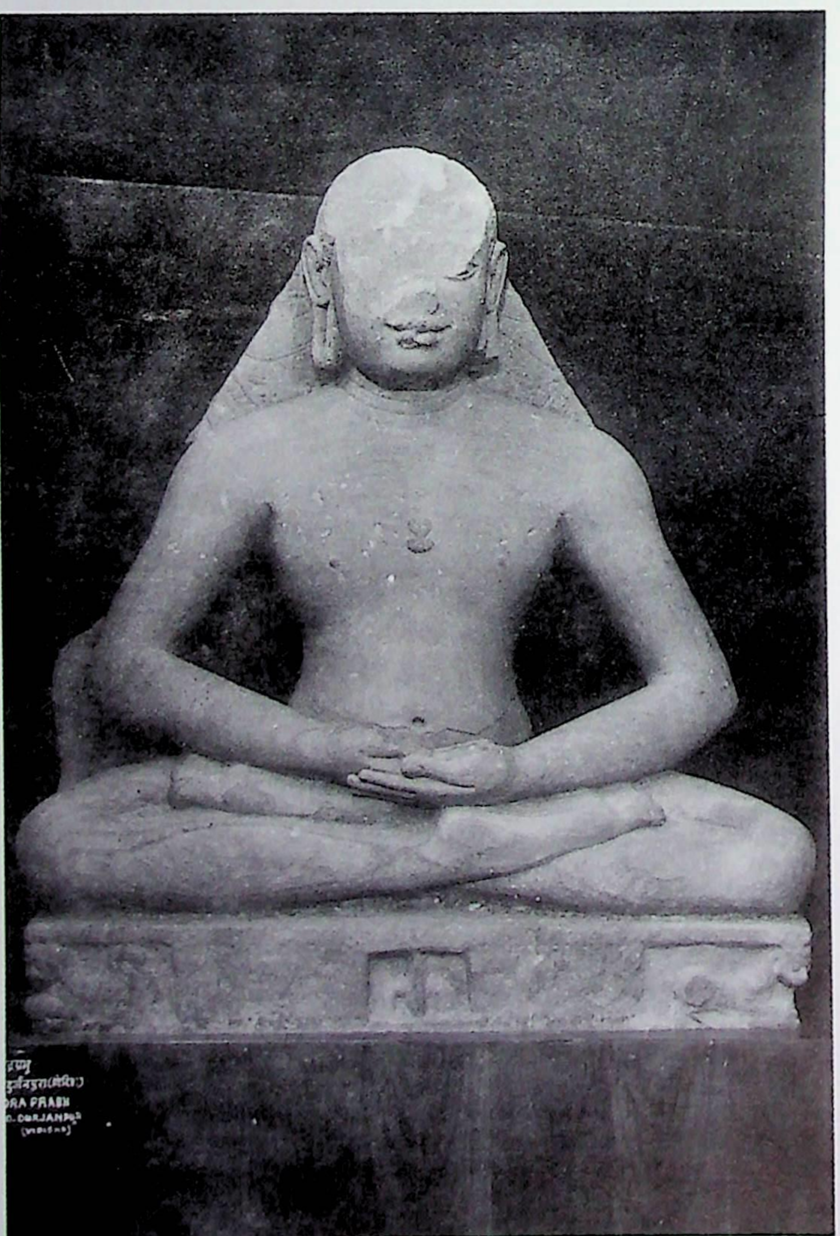
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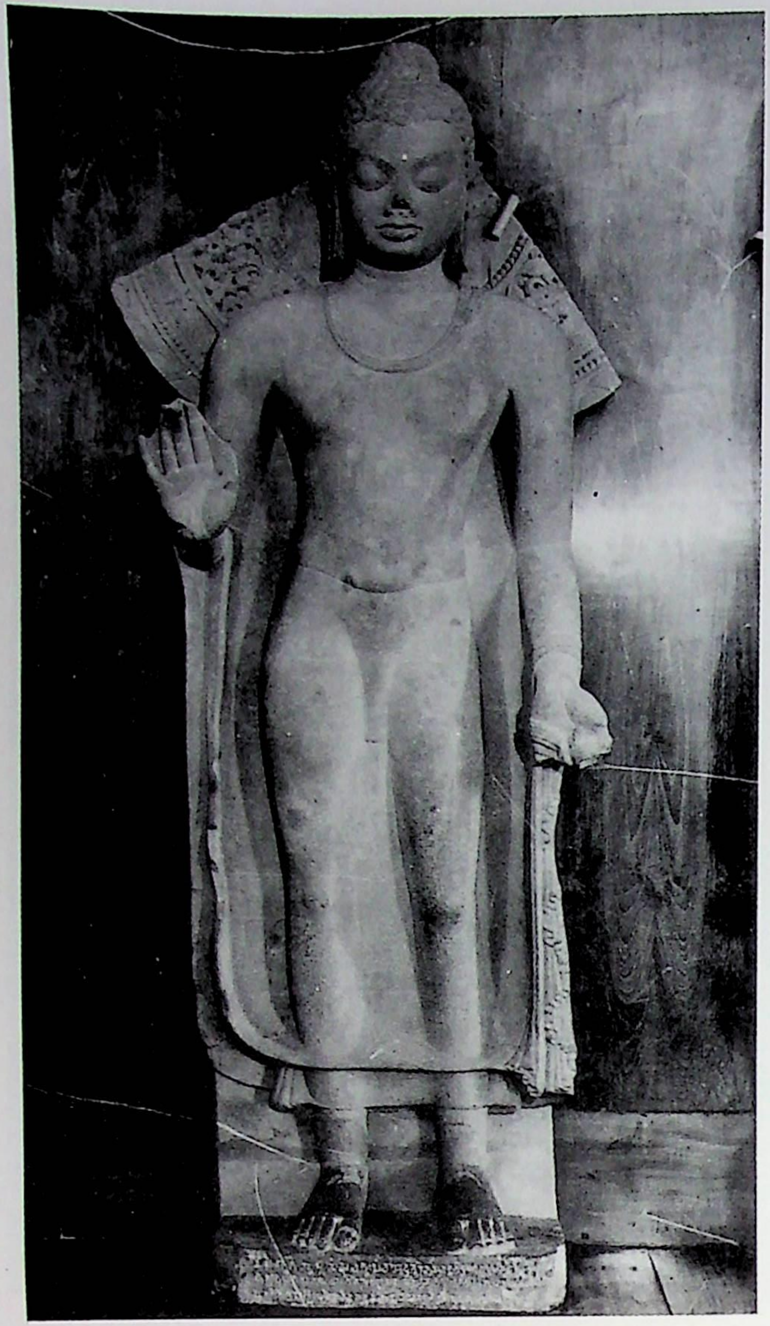
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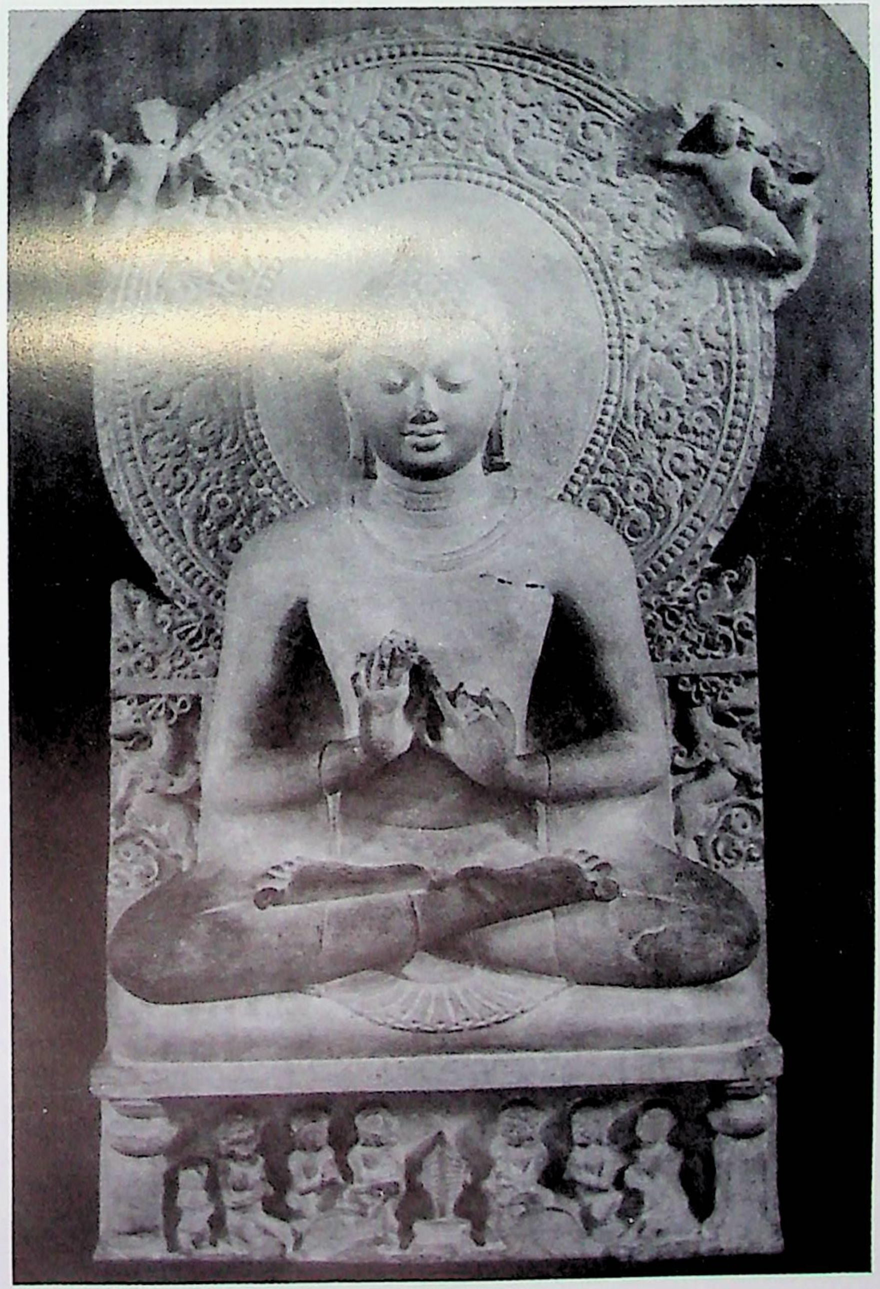
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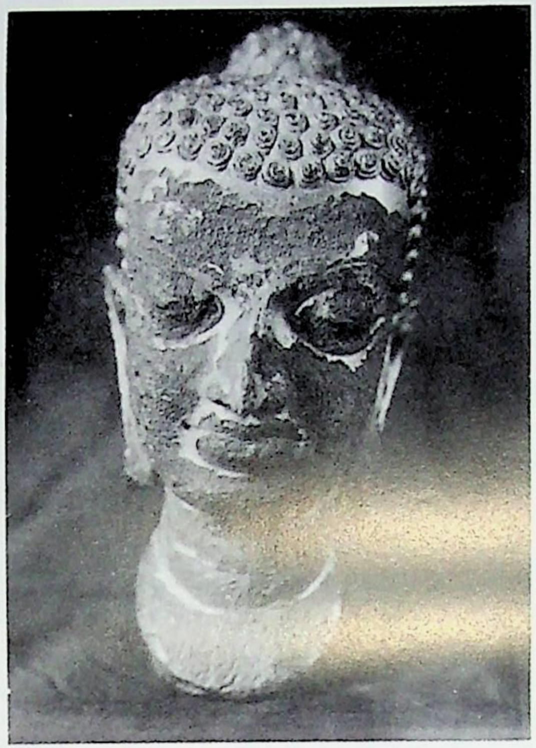
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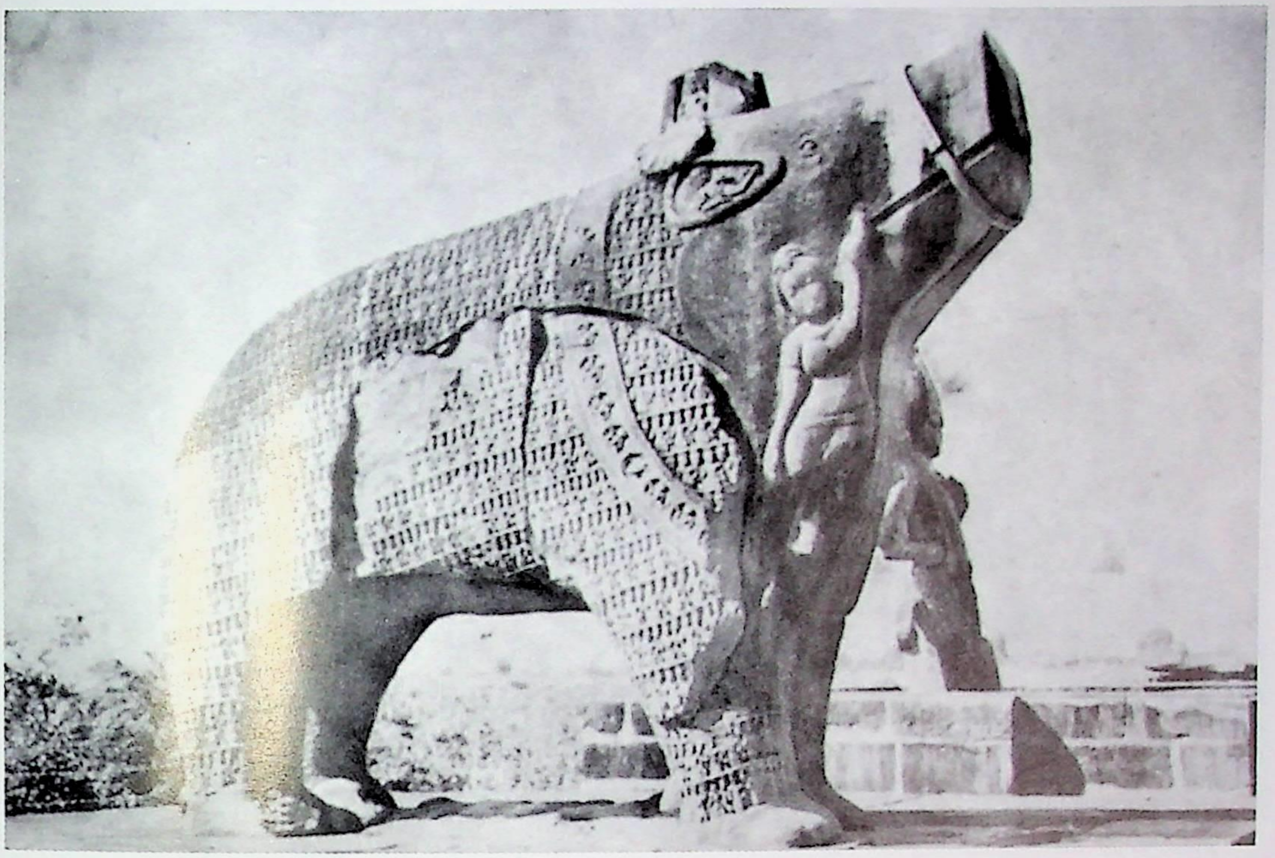


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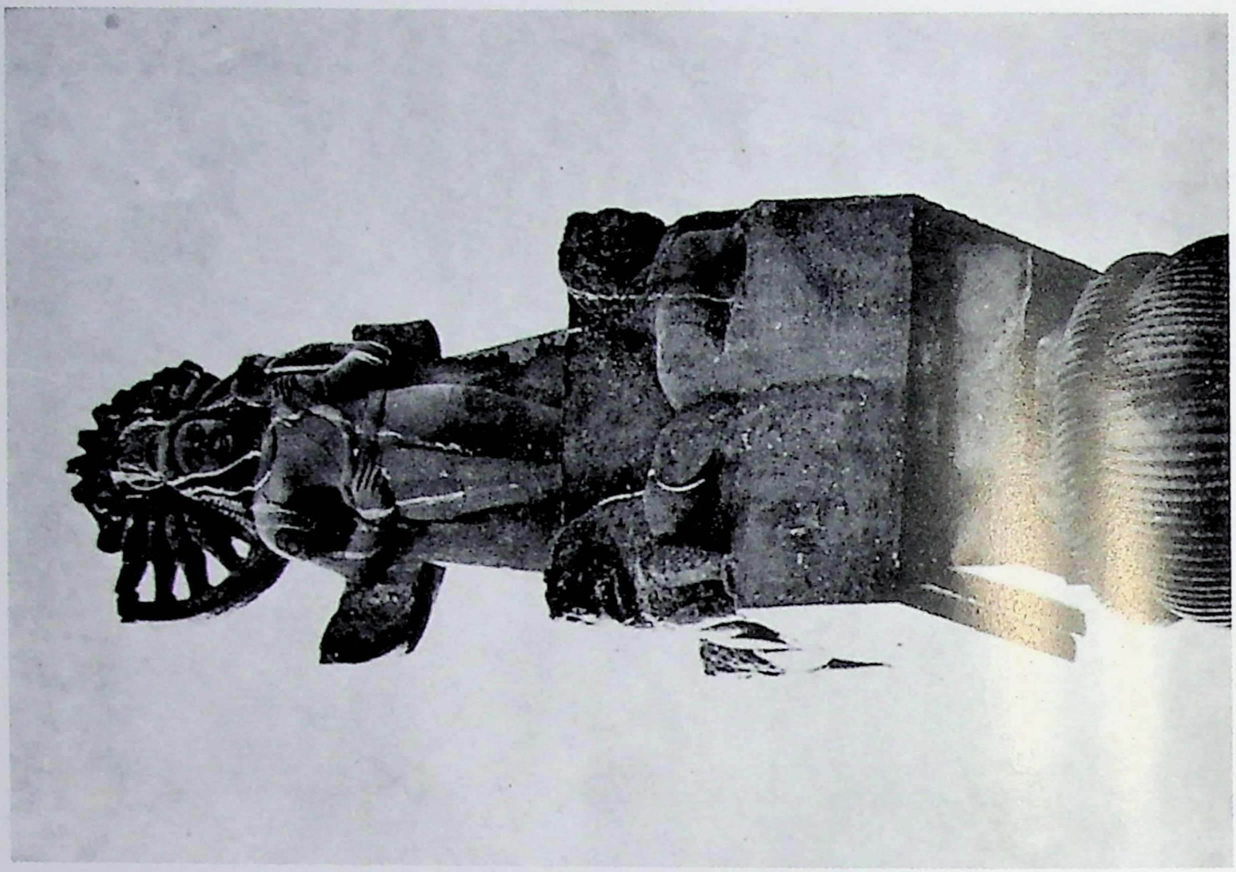


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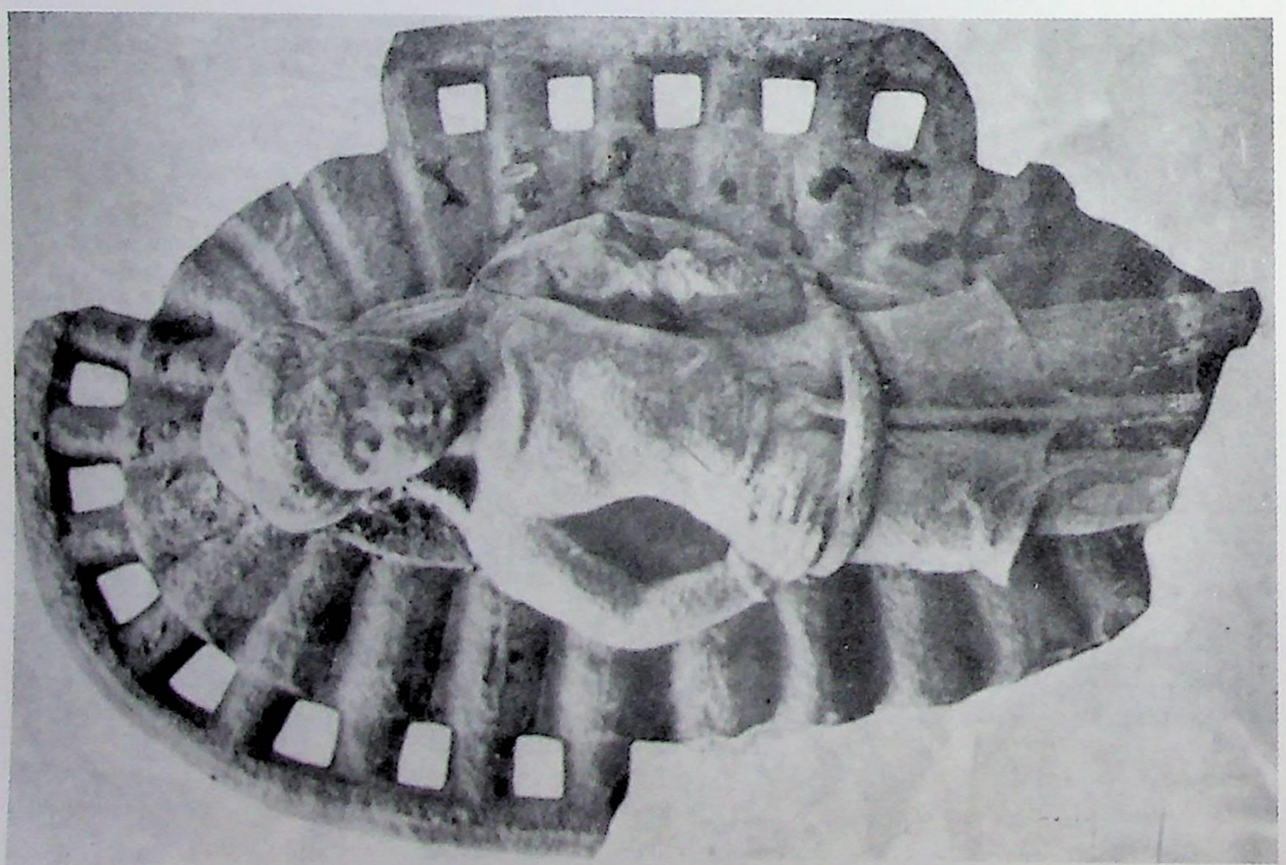


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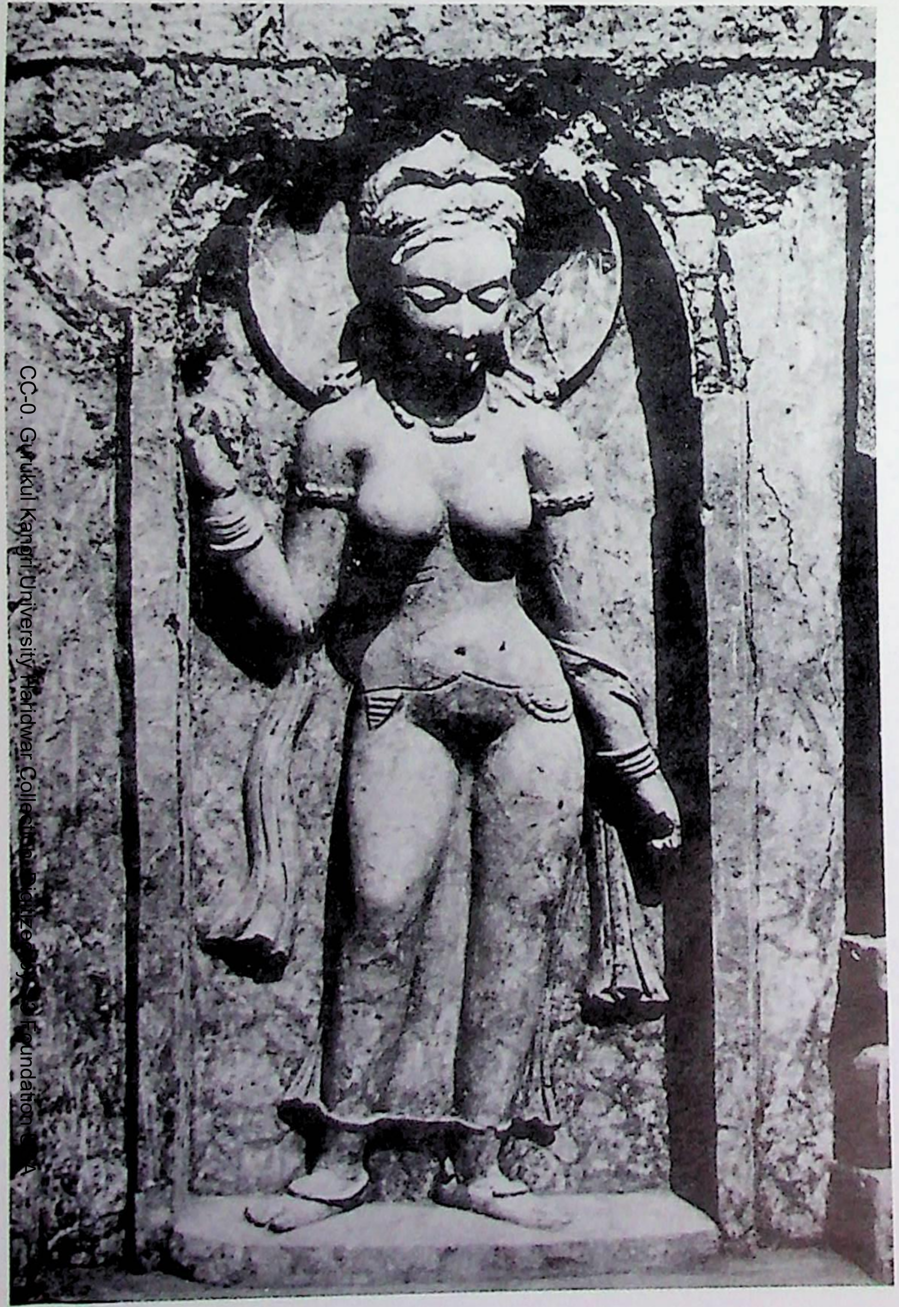




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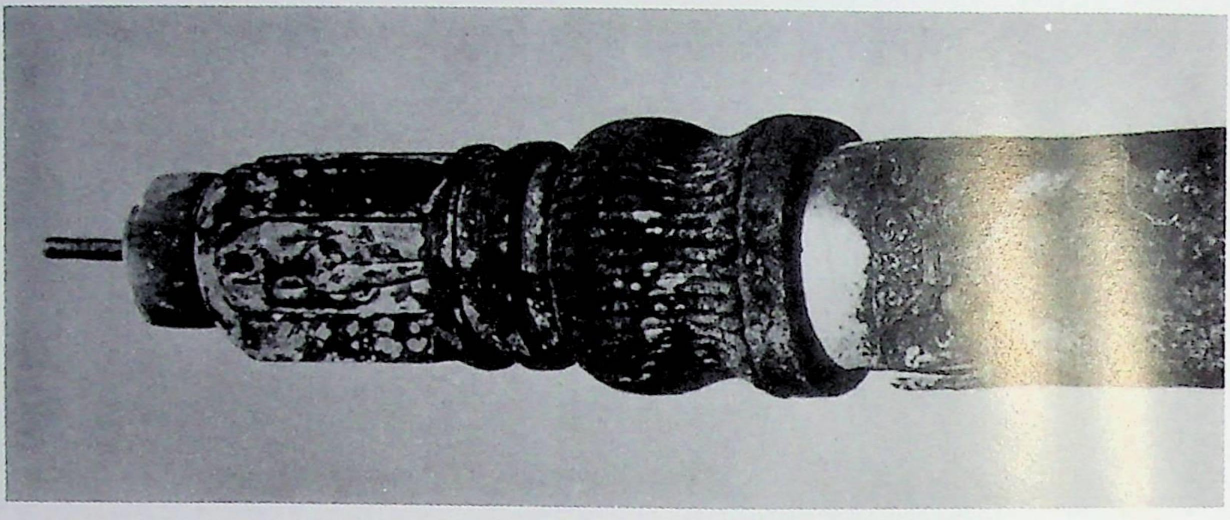
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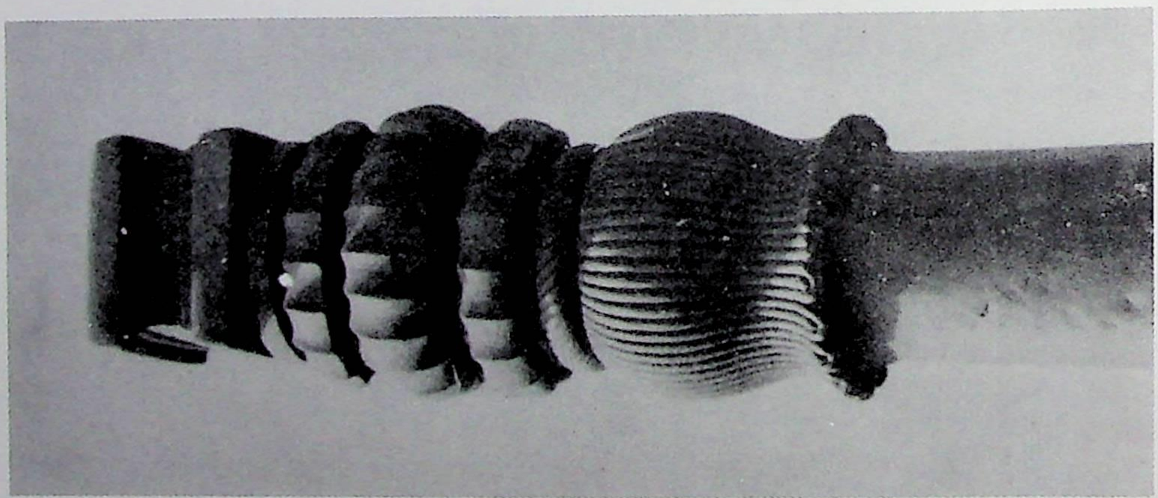
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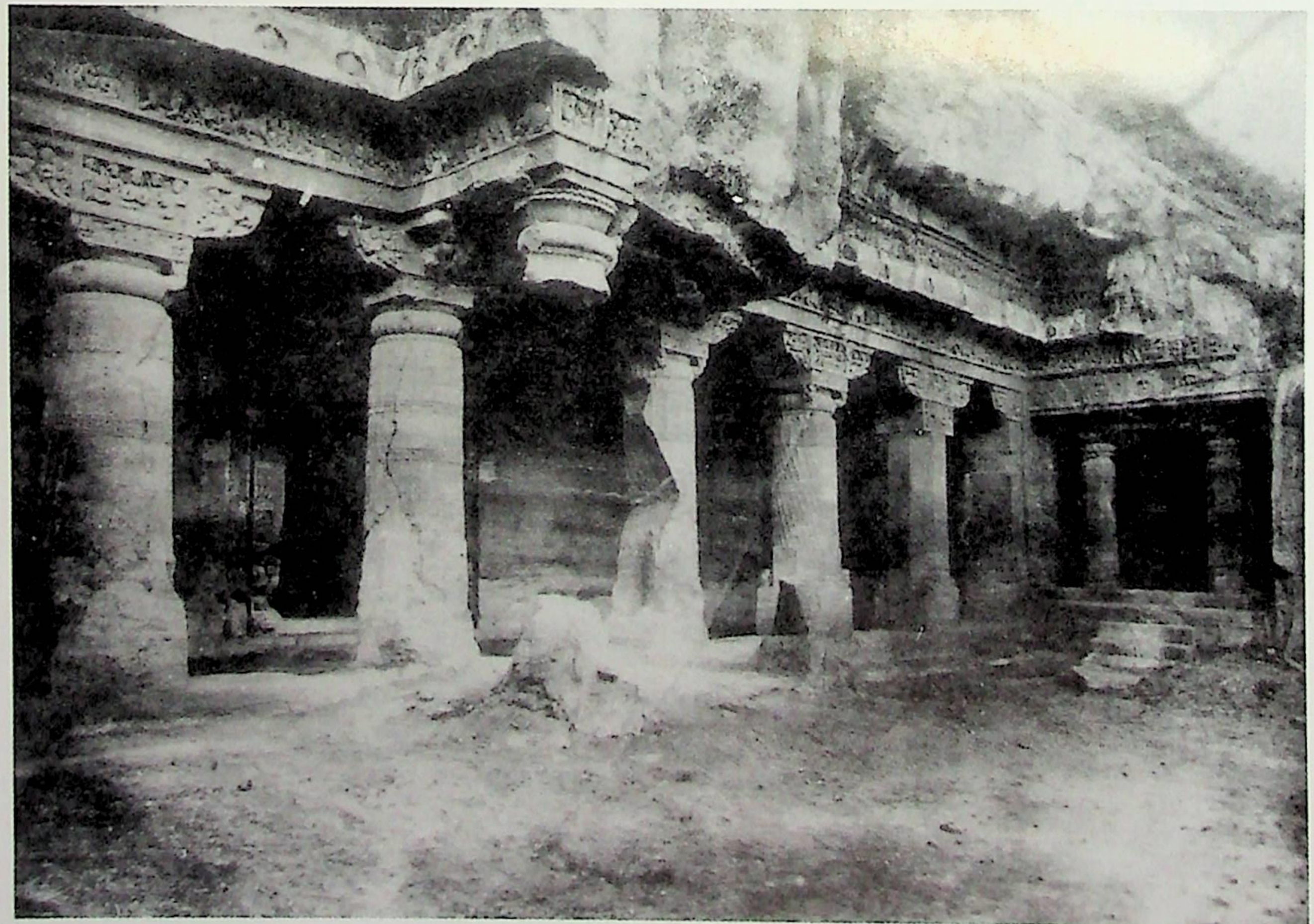
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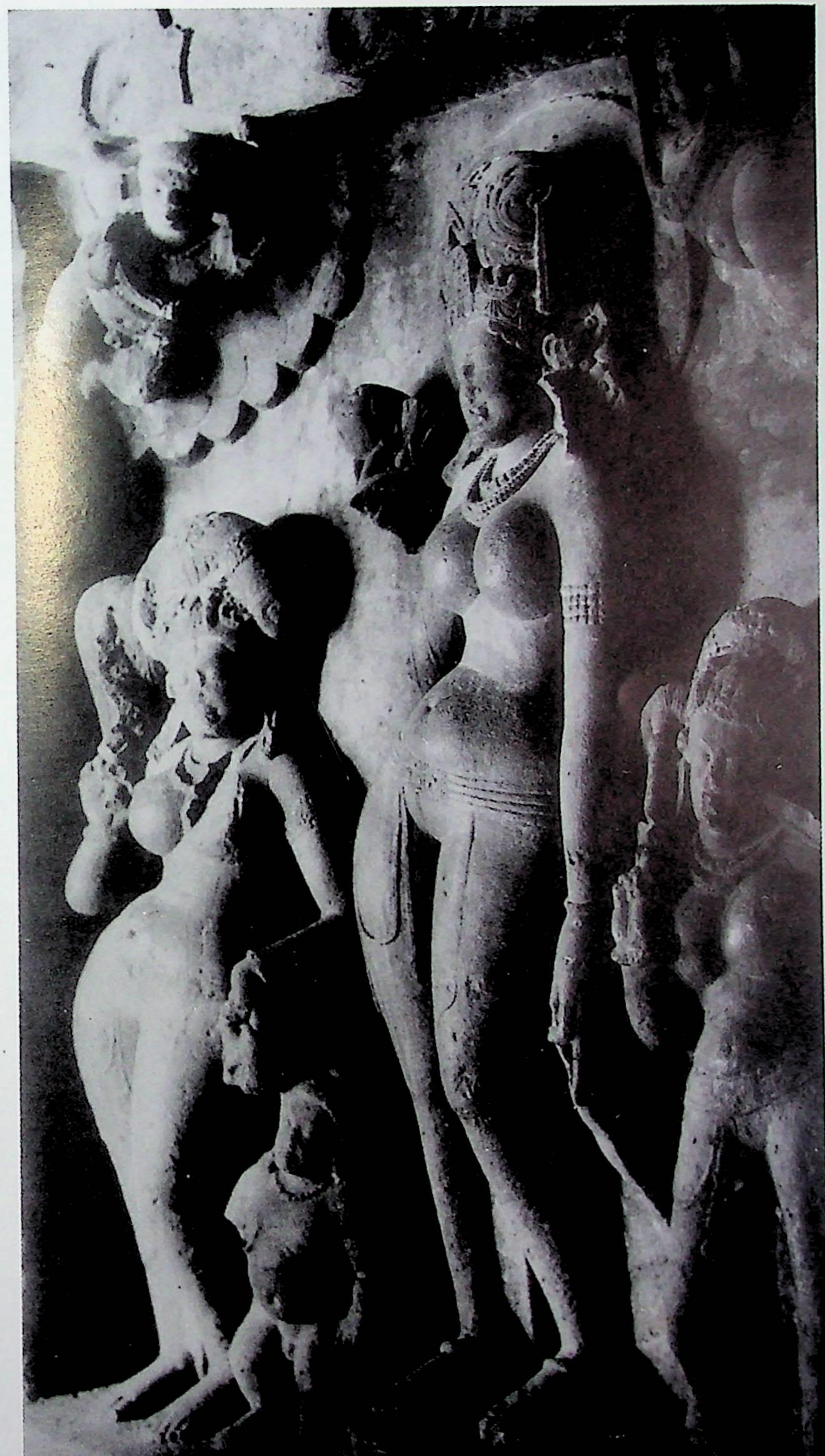












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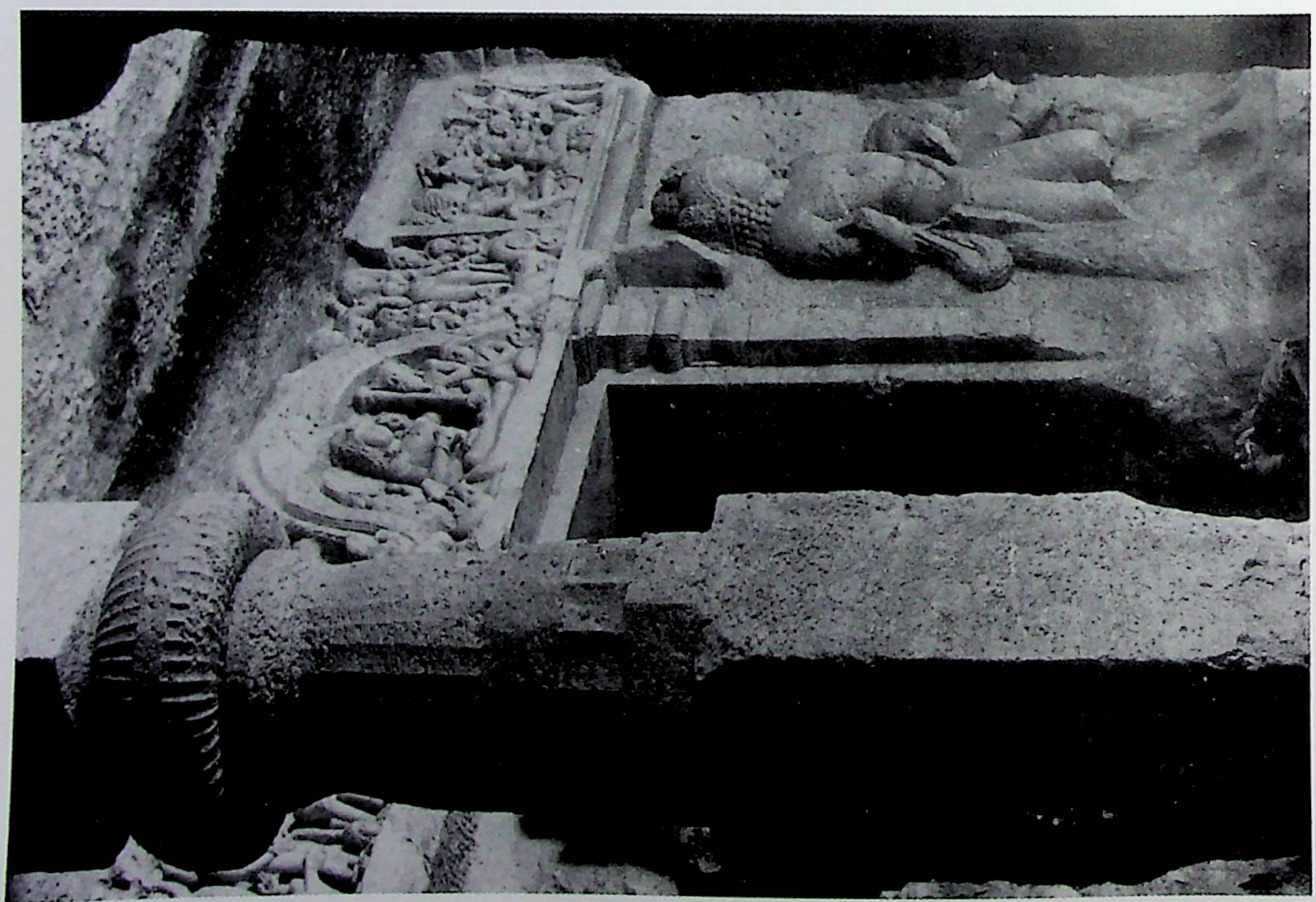
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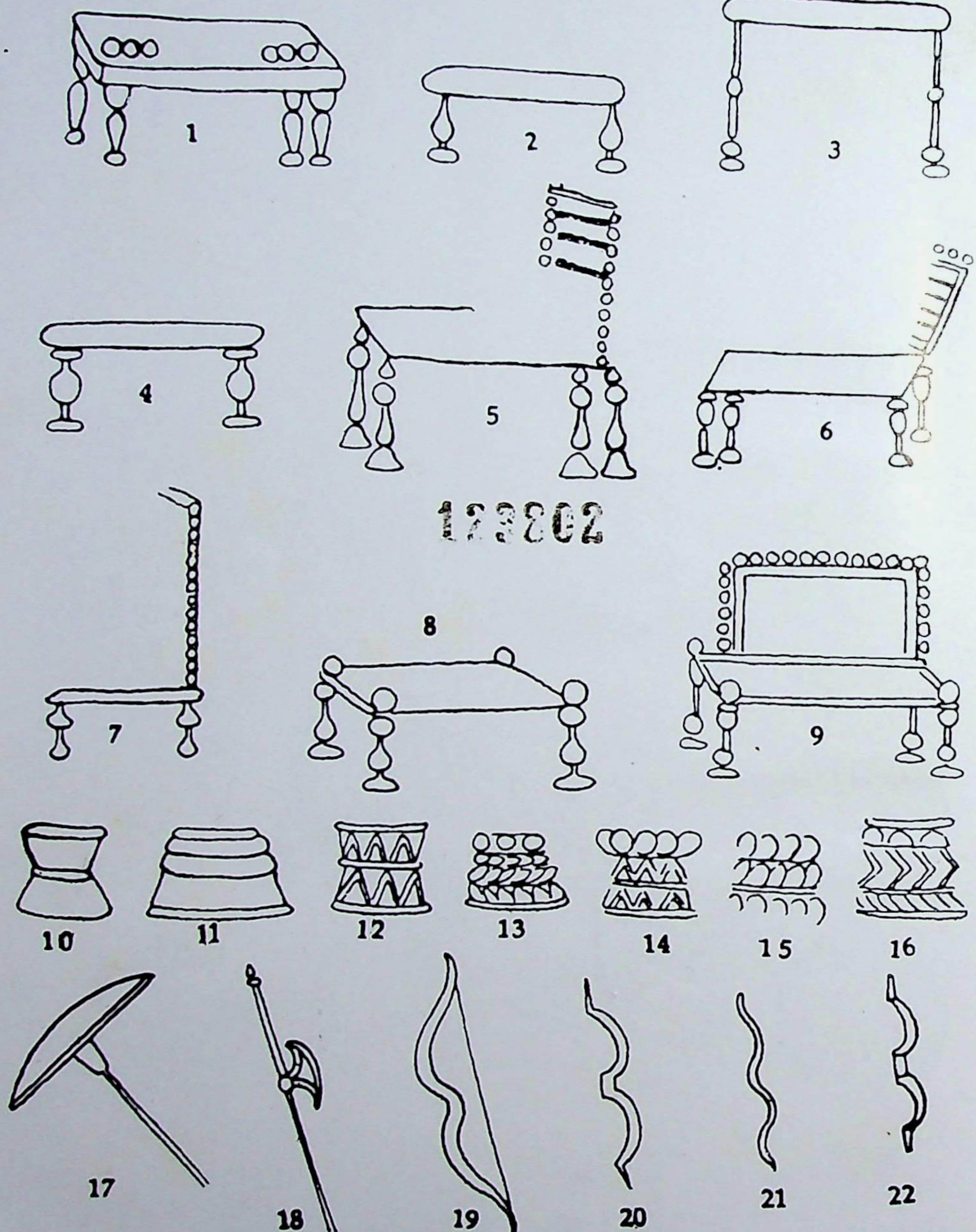
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was honoured with the General Presidentship of the Silver Jubilee Congress of the Epigraphical Society of India held at Udupi in April, 1999 and was elected the Honorary Fellow of the Society.

Professor Goyal has been deeply involved with the study of Gupta history. Between 1967 and 1999 he produced as many as seven works on the Gupta age, including *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, his Doctoral thesis described by Professor A.L. Basham as 'the best analysis of the Gupta period which I have ever read', *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, a corpus-like volume on the Gupta inscriptions and *An Introduction to Gupta Numismatics* admired by all for its high quality. Professor Goyal has so far been honoured with four festschrifts, including *S.R. Goyal : His Multidimensional Historiography* (ed. by Professor Jagannath Agrawal and Dr. Shankar Goyal) and *Reappraising Gupta History for S.R. Goyal* (ed. by Professor B. Ch. Chhabra et al) for his outstanding contribution to Gupta history.

Dr. Shankar Goyal is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History, JNV University, Jodhpur. He has already produced six monographs dealing with various aspects of the historiography of ancient India, his field of specialization, viz. *History and Historiography of the Age of Harsha* (1992), *Aspects of Ancient Indian History and Historiography* (1993), *History Writing of Early India : New Discoveries and Approaches* (1996), *The Image of Classical India : Its Changing Colours and Contours* (1997), his Doctoral work *Recent Historiography of Ancient India* (1997) and *Ancient Indian Numismatics : A Historiographical Study* (1998). His works have usually been described as 'most original', 'marvellous', 'dependable' and 'indispensable' by eminent historians and national and international journals. He has also co-edited several works with such eminent scholars as Professors G.C. Pande, B.Ch. Chhabra, Jagannath Agrawal and Shri Munish Chandra Joshi. He has also published over seventy research papers.

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